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Examining William Bickerton: A Forgotten Latter Day Prophet

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Abstract

The life of the nineteenth-century American prophet, William Bickerton, was not explored comprehensively until 2017-2018 — two centuries after his birth. His life offers new and exciting perspectives for the historiographies of American revivalism, Christian Restorationism, millennialism, Mormonism, and biography. My articles, “The Rocky Road to Prophethood: William Bickerton’s Emergence as an American Prophet” (2017) and “Opening the Windows of Heaven: The Bickertonite Spiritual Revival 1856-1858” (2018), along with my book, *William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet* (2018), utilise an emic approach to examine Bickerton and his religious movement within the contexts of American culture and Mormonism. Following in the footsteps of scholars such as Richard Lyman Bushman (biographer of Joseph Smith), John G. Turner (biographer of Brigham Young), and Deborah Madden (biographer of Richard Brothers), the work submitted applies a sympathetic, yet critical approach to examine Bickerton. It shows that he promoted unique Christian Restorationist, revivalist, and millennialist beliefs during the American Civil War, Reconstruction, and afterward, and fostered progressive theological innovations within the Latter Day Saint movement. The commentary on these submissions expands upon these ideas and argues that the most fruitful approach to Bickerton’s religious movement is to begin with the man himself. He was not only the leader, but the prophet, who motivated his people with exceptional visionary power. While accepting that there are weaknesses to biography (especially as the academy continues to favour scholarship that explores trends and processes within the confines of social history and bottom-up studies), this thesis argues that it continues to be a valuable approach for historians of religion. In particular, the hierarchical elements of biography work well when studying radical prophets and offer a foundational approach for understanding prophetic leaders, the culture they interacted with, and the people who followed them.

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Note: The content of Chapter Six in William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet transitions from the article, 'Opening the Windows of Heaven: The Bickertonite Spiritual Revival 1856-1858'

For over a century, the nineteenth-century American prophet, William Bickerton, and the religious movement he started, was relegated to the sidelines of Mormon studies and American religious history. Before the publication of *William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet* (2018), no comprehensive history had ever been written about him and his church, the Church of Jesus Christ. Other than a few general overviews published by the Church and independent historians, little information existed. To scholars interested in pursuing this topic, it could have appeared that there was little more to say. It was not until Gary R. Entz published two thoroughly researched articles about Bickerton that it became clear that more information existed.¹ Years later, I gained access to the Church of Jesus Christ's archives, allowing me to see thousands of pages of historical material few had accessed before. Through this experience, I learned just how polarising and complicated the Church's history actually was, and yet how rich and fruitful the topic could be for historians, especially since few scholarly interpretations had been produced. Metaphorically speaking, the field was ripe for picking — a rare occasion for historians of religion.

In order to study the Church of Jesus Christ within the subjects of Mormonism and American religion, it became clear to me that historians must first understand Bickerton. He was the man who initiated the religious movement, who dissented from mainstream Mormonism to establish a new American church. Bickerton's followers converted to the Church, yet the Church was led by him through his prophetic insight, placing him at the forefront of its history. To some, this traditional, top-down approach may seem outdated, especially when compared to the rise of social history and bottom-

¹ Gary R. Entz, "Zion Valley: The Mormon Origins of St. John, Kansas," *Kansas History* 24, no. 2 (2001), pp. 98-117; Gary R. Entz, "The Bickertonites: Schism and Reunion in a Restoration Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 3 (2006), pp. 1-44.

up studies in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is true these methods are often preferred by the academy and offer more holistic approaches that are invaluable to the study of history.² Nevertheless, biography, with its hierarchical elements, is also a foundational approach that can be used to understand the Bickertonites and make a significant contribution to Mormon studies and American religion.³ As historian Stephen C. Taysom stated, Bickerton's "life is the story of the inextricable links among individual personalities on one hand and how religions form, change, grow, decline, and situate themselves in varied geographical settings on the other." As a result, his life "will be of interest not only to scholars of the Latter Day Saint traditions but also those seeking a better understanding of the complexities of cultural/religious interactions in the American context."⁴ The articles, "The Rocky Road to Prophethood: William Bickerton's Emergence as an American Prophet" (2017) and "Opening the Windows of Heaven: The Bickertonite Spiritual Revival 1856-1858" (2018), along with the book, *William*

² For a good synopsis of how the "new" social history has evolved since 1970, especially how it has fragmented and synthesised American history, see Nicole Eustace, "When Fish Walk on Land: Social History in a Postmodern World," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003), pp. 77-91. For other studies on the "new" social history, see Harvey J. Graff, "The Shock of the 'New (Histories)': Social Science Histories and Historical Literacies," *Social Science History* 25, no. 4 (2001), pp. 483-533, Laurence Veysey, "The 'New' Social History in the Context of American Historical Writing," *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 1 (1979), pp. 1-12, and J.R. Pole, "The New History and the Sense of Social Purpose in American Historical Writing," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1973), pp. 221-42.

³ Even though biography has hierarchical elements, William Bickerton's life includes facets that would, no doubt, interest social historians. For instance, he was a lower-class English emigrant with little formal education who became a significant American religious figure. The social aspects of his life offer an interesting case study. Also, biographical writing often employs narrative, which at times, can be at odds with social historical writing. Yet in the postmodern age, narrative is still very important, even in social history. Nicole Eustace noted, "the urge to make meaning by telling stories is nearly universal," and "no matter the philosophical and political objections to the totalizing and even brutalizing potential of narratives, many early American historians insist there must be a way to have their social history and their stories too," see Eustace, "When Fish Walk on Land: Social History in a Postmodern World," p. 84. Biography, therefore, can be a useful way to synthesise aspects of both social history and narrative. As Paula Backscheider stated, "Narrative is the chief means by which we understand a life, ours or anyone else's, and endow it with coherence and meaning over time," see Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 230.

⁴ Endorsement by Stephen C. Taysom in Daniel P. Stone, *William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018), p. 407.

Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet (2018), provide a detailed biography of Bickerton which aims to contribute to the fields of American religious history, and specifically Mormon studies. These two subjects are where my scholarship makes an immediate impact. Mormon studies (including Mormon biography), is a burgeoning field, and these works are some of the first, in-depth examinations of Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ. However, to begin this commentary, it is important to place Bickerton within the larger framework of American religion and its historiography, expanding on broader topics that my scholarship already touches on. By first contextualising Bickerton within a broader historical setting, it will set the stage for how my publications break new ground within the evolving historiographies of Mormon history and biography, most notably with regard to my emic approach toward Bickerton and his millenarian beliefs. This will further demonstrate that Bickerton was both a fascinating prophet of the nineteenth century and an important, yet scarcely studied maverick who offers new and exciting perspectives for the historiographies of American revivalism, Christian Restorationism, millennialism, Mormonism, and biography.

William Bickerton and American Religion

American Methodism prepared William Bickerton for Mormonism and millenarianism. While living in Western Pennsylvania, he was a member of the flourishing Methodist faith. At the time of Joseph Smith's assassination in 1844, Methodism had become America's most popular form of Christianity: 1,068,525 members, 3,988 itinerant preachers, 7,730 local preachers, and countless congregants. Around the same time, Bickerton had just relocated from Wheeling, Virginia to West

Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, a coal-mining borough fifteen miles southeast of Pittsburgh. As a poor English emigrant living near the “Birmingham of America,” Bickerton embraced the most prominent religion of the Second Great Awakening.⁵

American Methodism’s defining theology was its “Arminianism set on fire.”⁶ The doctrine stressed a belief in the free will and autonomy of individuals in religion and life, which corresponded well with the American ideal of self-determination. Many Americans in search of a better life in the West adhered to this conviction, and Bickerton was no exception. The theology emphasised Jesus Christ’s universal atonement, but concluded that people could resist God’s spirit and grace, bringing upon themselves eternal destruction. The doctrine prescribed that man must exercise penitence, experience a deep conviction of sin, and through faith, feel the regeneration of the soul. Arminianism did not hold an idealistic view of human nature, yet it taught that through an understanding of God’s grace, Christ’s atonement, and the Holy Spirit’s sanctification, people could be saved at the last day. Methodists also believed in the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Men and women yearning for moral instruction could receive direct revelation from God (although Methodists started to retreat from a belief in charismatic personal revelations, like visions and dreams, in the 1820s). The faith’s conscription of common people, especially uneducated men to preach the gospel, is one of the reasons it caught the attention of so many Americans and immigrants, especially those in search of primitive Christianity. Methodist itinerant preachers could reach the masses. Their lack of formal theological training meant they preached a simple, direct, and forceful

⁵ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 437; Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 4-5.

⁶ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, pp. 438-39; David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion c. 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 16.

gospel that resonated with the people. By the 1840s, Methodist meetings had become more formal, but glimpses of its past revivalism could still appear. This was Bickerton's American religious foundation, and it served him well when he transitioned through two Mormon denominations to become his own millennial prophet.⁷

When Bickerton first heard Sidney Rigdon preach in 1845, it appears he was prepared to hear the Mormon message. Not only was he involved with Methodism, but he would have been familiar with the religious trends of the antebellum period, such as the Holiness movement, mysticism, and public displays of spirituality.⁸ Yet Rigdon offered Bickerton a gospel he “was never taught,” one that included all the promises found in the New Testament, especially spiritual gifts.⁹ Other than more commonly accepted miracles like divine healings, evangelicals like the Methodists usually rejected sensational gifts of the spirit, like speaking in tongues and prophecy. At this time, these

⁷ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, pp. 326-27, 436-39; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 239-41; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 82-83. For examinations of American Methodism as a form of primitivist Christianity and revivalism, see Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitfield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), and John H. Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For multidisciplinary examinations of American Methodism, especially with focuses on cultural and intellectual history, see Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001). For overviews of American Methodism, see John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010).

⁸ For examinations of the Holiness movement, see Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Lunham: Scarecrow Press, 1996), and Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). For an examination of American spirituality and mysticism, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

⁹ William Bickerton, et al., *Ensign: or a Light to Lighten the Gentiles, in which the Doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is Set Forth, and Scripture Evidence Adduced to Establish it. Also, a Brief Treatise upon the Most Important Prophecies Recorded in the Old and New Testaments, which relate to the Great Work of God of the Latter Days* (Pittsburgh: Ferguson & Co., 1863), p. 5, typescript in the Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

types of spiritual gifts were only practiced by a few religious traditions in North America, namely the Mormons, Shakers, Swedenborgians, among others. From this moment forward, spiritual gifts would play a central role in Bickerton's religious life.

He was a revivalist preacher, utilising aspects from evangelical groups, especially the Methodists and Christian Restorationists.¹⁰ God was a loving being who offered salvation to all free human agents, Bickerton professed. The prophet approached people's salvation holistically, striking a balance between faith (an internal belief) and repentance and baptism (external acts of obedience). People could receive an endowment of the Holy Ghost and obtain perfection in Christ, even to the point of manifesting charismatic spiritual gifts. This made Bickerton's form of revivalism quite distinctive when compared to other revivalist preachers who did not promote such excesses.¹¹ Instances of speaking in tongues, interpretations of tongues, prophecy, visions, and dreams are constant throughout the Church of Jesus Christ's history. Altogether, this intense form of spirituality, which utilised emotion, intellectual engagement with scripture, and personal revelation, is what Bickerton insisted his church was founded on. The Church "was organized by the inspiration of God, and it is

¹⁰ Christian Restorationism, also known as Primitivism, was a movement to restore the apostolic or primordial church as described in the New Testament. The movement existed since the birth of Christianity, but it took on a new form in the United States during the nineteenth century. This will be examined in more detail below. For an in-depth definition, see Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 1-14, and Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 2-7.

¹¹ Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists from Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2017), pp. 130, 211; David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 9-11. For good examples of William Bickerton's revival-style oratory, including his thoughts on personal faith and revelation, see Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 81-82, 111-12, 164-65.

to be perpetuated by continual revelation,” he wrote in 1903.¹² Carrying on an American tradition established during the First and Second Great Awakenings by burgeoning denominations, especially radical evangelicals, the Church of Jesus Christ offered an apostolic Christianity that stressed the egalitarian importance of the Holy Spirit to initiate personal conversions and sanctifications. As a demonstration that people’s lives were being transformed by the gospel, signs of the Holy Spirit were expected to follow, heightening the spiritual awareness of Bickerton’s denomination.¹³

Bickerton’s prophethood could also be deemed radical. Christopher Rowland in his book, *Radical Prophet* (2017), offered criteria for judging this type of religious figure, and Bickerton fits well within the framework. Radical prophethood is open to all, impulsive, reactionary, averse to tradition, restorationist, and millennial.¹⁴ Bickerton believed prophecy was open to anyone, regardless of race or gender. At times, he acted impulsively, challenging the status quo of both Mormonism and Christianity by presenting his own revelations, which placed his people on a trajectory that was supposed to change the world, challenging its current political and social structures. And yet he also had conservative beliefs, sometimes relying on traditional Christian or

¹² Bickerton, *Ensign*, p. 5; John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), pp. 30-33; William Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” p. 13, in The Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive, Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Bickerton’s church is a fairly unknown denomination that could serve as yet another case study for how continuing revelation and scripture-making functions in religion. For books focused on this topic, see Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), Eugene V. Gallagher, *Reading and Writing Scripture in New Religious Movements: New Bibles and New Revelations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹³ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. xiv-xv; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 9-11.

¹⁴ Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries Who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 5-8, 167-70.

Mormon precedents to organise and coordinate his own religious movement. The key to Bickerton's radical thought, however, like the many other prophets Rowland discussed, was his desire to see the New Jerusalem built on earth, or his hope to see heaven and earth converge. He was a millenarian prophet who believed men and women could play a prominent role in the end of time. He sprung forth at a moment of great uncertainty within the Latter Day Saint movement and the United States and claimed to have the answers that would help inaugurate the Millennium.

Bickerton inherited another religious ideal while living in Antebellum America, most likely stemming from his association with Methodism, but intensifying under Mormonism: Christian Primitivism (also known as Restorationism). This movement attempted to restore original Christianity as described in the New Testament. In one form or another, the movement existed since the birth of Christianity, but it took on a new form after the American Revolution and during the Second Great Awakening. The theme of recovery was apparent among several American Christian denominations. They wanted to recover a primordial past that stood behind a profane past; a sacred time that was hidden under a profane time. As Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen put it, "examples of Israel, Jesus, the apostles, and the primitive church belonged to the primordial; they were not products of history—they had founded the only real history there was ... All intervening history was profane."¹⁵

¹⁵ Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, pp. 2-7. Theodore D. Bozeman, in his examination of Puritan Primitivism, agreed with this concept of the primordial past. He wrote, "Primitivism embraced the conviction that the Christian pilgrimage forth through the age of reformation and toward the eschatological climax was simultaneously a retrogression. To move forward was to strive without rest for reconnection with the paradigmatic events and utterances of ancient and unspoiled times," see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 11.

The movement was also a way to combat America's potent religious pluralism. Groups like the Mormons, Shakers, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ appealed to a largely Christian populace that had recently won a revolution to bring about a new age, or as Thomas Paine put it, "to begin the world over again."¹⁶ These Christians hoped to accomplish the same spiritually, to unite the growing sectarianism of American religious society by appealing to the apostolic primordial past. All these denominations had different methods for carrying out this task, along with different beliefs as to what the apostolic church actually was, and they all created even more sectarianism. But on the whole, their intentions were the same and fit well within the new American Republic.¹⁷

To compare all the different methods of nineteenth-century Christians to restore the apostolic church would take a comprehensive study, but here Mormonism can be viewed within the framework of traditional Christian Restorationism, which will help bring Bickerton's church into focus within American religion. Christian Restorationists held two central premises: Baconian rationalism was the only tool to be used to interpret the Bible, and the New Testament was the only blueprint to restore primitive Christianity. These Christians believed they could use biblical text as an empirical fact to sort out the problems of epistemology and morality to prove the rationality of faith. They believed they could prove all knowledge (theological, ethical, or scientific) through reason, with the Bible serving as a foundation for reason.¹⁸ Mormons on the other hand, looked to Joseph Smith as the fount of spiritual knowledge, who in turn looked to the Bible, Book

¹⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: Fall River Press, 1995), p. 65.

¹⁷ Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, pp. 1-24; Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, pp. 1-14; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 167-70; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 380-81.

¹⁸ Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, pp. 133, 155.

of Mormon, and his revelations for clarity and purpose. Through Smith, Mormons were not only able to connect to the primordial apostolic church, but to Jesus, Moses, the Hebrew patriarchs, Adam, and even to days further back. Similar to Christian Restorationists, who sought to repair the breach between heaven and earth by restoring the primitive church, Smith took a step further by not only restoring the church, but man's cosmic relationship with God himself (or in actuality, the gods). All people, in essence, were spiritual children who had been birthed in the celestial world by heavenly parents, Smith and his apostles taught, and by following the tenets of the Mormon faith, all could reach exaltation in the afterlife (godhood for men, heavenly motherhood for women). Exaltation was increased through one's righteousness and performance of sacred ordinances, namely plural marriage. Harold Bloom summarised the Mormon imagination well:

If the entire quest of Joseph's life was to restore archaic religion, in which spirit and matter, God and man, were to differ only in degree, not in kind, then the culmination of that quest had to be plural marriage ... His prophetic aim was nothing less than to change the whole nature of the human, or to bring about in the spiritual realm what the American Revolution had inaugurated in the sociopolitical world. Kings and nobles had lost their relevance to Americans; that hierarchy had been abolished. Joseph Smith, in his final phase, pragmatically abolished the more fearsome hierarchy of official Christianity. Plural marriage was to be the secret key that unlocked the gate between the divine and the human.¹⁹

What gave Smith greater clout among his followers in comparison to other Christian Restorationists was his single claim to divine authority. In 1829, Smith claimed he received the holy priesthood by ordination from three heavenly messengers, the apostles Peter, James, and John, and through his seership by translating the Book of Mormon. Unlike other Christian Restorationists, who claimed to receive ministerial authority from the Bible alone, sometimes with the help of an education, Smith (similar

¹⁹ Harold Bloom, *The American People: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), p. 105.

to the Christian maverick and Restorationist Roger Williams two centuries earlier) understood that the true apostolic church had vanished from the earth due to its corruption and could only be restored through an apostle or prophet who would receive divine authority from God in the latter days.²⁰

Bickerton too was a Christian Restorationist. He claimed priesthood authority from his ordination under Sidney Rigdon, the first counsellor to Joseph Smith, and from his vivid revelations. With this claim, Bickerton became inextricably connected to the Latter Day Saint movement. Yet he somewhat differed from Christian Restorationism and Mormonism by one striking fact. While both attempted to recover the primitive Christian church, Bickerton, on the other hand, attempted to recover what had already been restored. This is another reason why Bickerton and his religious movement are significant within the historiography of American religion. As discussed in the article, “The Rocky Road to Prophethood,” Bickerton believed that Joseph Smith had restored the true Christian church, but like Christian leaders before him, he had adulterated it with his own misguided teachings and manmade theologies. Other factional Latter Day Saints believed this as well, but Bickerton applied a unique approach to recover the restored church. As the leading prophet, Bickerton had to balance his reliance on

²⁰ Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” *The Ensign* (December 1996), pp. 33-37; Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, p. 136; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 167-70. For a focused comparison of Joseph Smith and Alexander Campbell, see RoseAnn Benson, *Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith: Nineteenth-Century Restorationists* (Provo: BYU Press, 2017). Joseph Smith was not a lone Restorationist prophet during the nineteenth century. Others like Ann Lee, George Rapp, Bernhard Mueller, and John Alexander Dowie believed in prophetic Christian Restorationism, namely that God had called them as leaders to restore true Christianity. They also believed that they needed to prepare their followers for the Millennium, take part in communal living, and exhibit spiritual gifts. In essence, there were other radical prophets attempting to restore the primordial past in America. For a thorough examination comparing the Mormons with the Shakers, see Stephen C. Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); For an examination of George Rapp, Bernhard Mueller, and their religious societies, see Karl J.R. Arndt, “George Rapp’s Harmony Society,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 57-87; For an examination of John Alexander Dowie and his religious society, see Philip L. Cook, *Zion City, Illinois: Twentieth-Century Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

Baconian rationalism using the Bible and Book of Mormon and personal revelation. He or anyone in his church could receive direct revelation from God to help guide the people, but revelation could not override the fundamental principles and theology found in the Bible and Book of Mormon. Revelation corroborated with scripture; it could not supersede it.²¹ Also, Bickerton was the only major claimant to Joseph Smith's prophetic mantle that did not have a direct connection to Smith or the early Mormon Church. He converted to Sidney Rigdon's restorationist version of Mormonism after Smith's death. Bickerton's church, therefore, was an amalgamation of several Christian movements. It contained elements of revivalist Protestantism and early Mormonism.

What is made clear through Bickerton's religious journey is that dissent is a common by-product of Christian Primitivism. One's zeal to reform or restore the true Christian church often leads a person to leave their religious home. Another major by-product of Christian Primitivism is millennialism. What is implicit in most Christian Primitivist writings is that while seeking to restore the primordial past, there was a clear hope that the Millennium would complete the restoration of what history had polluted. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ would be the final act to restore the kingdom of God on Earth.²² Although this belief could be applied in one form or another to different millennialist movements (whether premillennialist or postmillennialist), the belief that it was possible to recover the apostolic Christian church was particularly seen in those

²¹ Daniel P. Stone, "The Rocky Road to Prophethood: William Bickerton's Emergence as an American Prophet," *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 1 (January 2017), pp. 16-20.

²² Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, pp. 12-14; Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, pp. 1-2, 13; Noll, *America's God*, p. 176; Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 299; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 169-70, 187-89.

who had millenarian beliefs. “Claims on the part of millenarians [have been] that they were restoring apostolic Christianity,” Ernest R. Sandeen pointedly remarked.²³

To bring millenarian beliefs into focus, a religious movement often needs a prophet to give that movement coherence. According to J.F.C. Harrison, a prophet “is the bearer of the millenarian ideas, his presence gives them a sense of immediacy, and he becomes the centre round which the movement revolves.” He added, “Certain socio-economic factors and a situation in which unusual distress, anxiety, and feelings of relative deprivation can develop are also associated with the appearance of prophets and millenarian movements - and may indeed be necessary conditions for that emergence.”²⁴ As Christopher Rowland asserted, the mission of a radical prophet is to have a restlessness with society and the world, along with a hope to recover the roots of

²³ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 4. See also Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 130-38. Nathan Hatch agreed with Sandeen’s assertion, especially when examining eighteenth and nineteenth-century Christian Restorationism: “Restoring the apostolic order—and thus heralding the millennial kingdom—could only be done by the re-creative power of handfuls of faithful believers intent on following the New Testament pattern,” see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 167-70. Theodore Bozeman, however, when examining an earlier form of Christian Restorationism in New England Puritanism, argued that the Puritans did not try to inaugurate the Millennium through their primitivist reforms, but rather attempted to restore the Christian church in a land free from papal influence. New England Puritanism was therefore an extension of the Protestant Reformation, see Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*. Zachary McLeod Hutchins agreed with Bozeman’s thoughts about the Puritans, but also acknowledged that the Puritans looked forward to an edenic Earth at the time of Jesus Christ’s return: “The edenic strain runs throughout [John] Winthrop’s sermon [“A Modell of Christian Charity”] as he points both backward, to Adam and Eve in Eden, and forward, to the promise of Christ’s millennial reign over the church, which will then become like a new Adam made perfect, collapsing the distinction between primitive and millennial hopes for the Bay Colony.” Hutchins’s interests were broader than Bozeman’s. He looked at several religious thinkers in colonial New England, along with the literature of the era. Hutchins’s main argument was that “a wish to pull paradise into the pragmatic details of life, shaped the culture and material circumstances of a much earlier time and place: colonial New England,” see Zachary McLeod Hutchins, *Inventing Eden: Primitivism, Millennialism, and the Making of New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 3, 16. As we can see, the debate still continues as to whether Christian Restorationism, in all its forms, was simply meant to return to a primordial past for the common good or was to help inaugurate the Millennium. As Hutchins demonstrates, perhaps at times, it was both.

²⁴ J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 11.

a primordial past to inaugurate the promised glories of Christian eschatology.²⁵ This was especially true of William Bickerton, who matured as a prophet in the midst of the American Civil War, a time of great unrest, uncertainty, and hardship.

The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict to occur in United States history, evoking great anguish in the hearts of the American people. For many, the Bible was an apt source from which to draw prophetic insight about the calamities the nation was facing. Jeremiads appeared in churches, literature, and the press, offering explanations as to why the United States was suffering a catastrophic war. The North and South may have held their own beliefs as to the righteousness of their causes, but as James H. Moorhead, Terri Dopp Aamodt, and Andrew R. Murphy asserted, several Americans, including Abraham Lincoln, soon came to see the war as a chastisement on the entire country for sins committed by both parties, namely “ingratitude, intemperance, violation of the Sabbath, infidelity, adultery, murder, unjust wars, and oppression.”²⁶ These wrongs seemed to stem from two major deficiencies: a national toleration of slavery and a lack of self-discipline within American democracy. Like ancient Israel, America was seen as having lost track of its divine destiny, with the Civil War acting as a punishment for this neglect.²⁷ William Bickerton agreed with these opinions, but differed in his belief as to what would happen after the war. Many religious Americans came to see the war as a postmillennialist catastrophe, a conflict that had arrived to purge the nation of its

²⁵ Rowland, *Radical Prophet*, pp. 7, 168-69.

²⁶ James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 47.

²⁷ Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, pp. 43-47; Terri Dopp Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), pp. 35-36; Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 44-49.

sins so it could righteously spread its democracy and ideals around the world, even existing as the last great military power to help usher in the Millennium.²⁸ Bickerton's opinion of the war, however, was much more grim. Bickerton had premillennialist opinions similar to some radical abolitionists, believing that the war was sent by God to destroy the United States for its sins, notably slavery, and to help usher in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Bickerton also had his eyes on the American Indians, seeing the oppression they endured as similar to that of black slaves. According to Joseph Smith's Civil War prophecy, God would unleash the slaves and Indians upon the white Americans during the war, bringing further destruction upon the United States to prepare the way for the righteous to build the New Jerusalem and await the imminent return of Christ. While watching awful tribulation unfold before them, Bickerton's followers not only believed Smith's prophecy was being fulfilled, but came to see Bickerton as the prophet who would help lead the righteous through this terrible destruction.²⁹ The war led Bickerton, like other pastors in his day, to find the war's fulfillment in biblical prophecy, especially in the book of Isaiah, chapter 18. America was "a nation scattered and peeled," a country "meted out and trodden down," whose survivors would one day bring presents to the Lord in the Millennium.³⁰ Unlike Christians

²⁸ Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, pp. 61, 71-81; Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause*, pp. 123-26; Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, pp. 62-66; Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 398-99; George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) pp. 358-59; Matthew Harper, "Emancipation and African American Millennialism," in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era*, eds. Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), p. 170.

²⁹ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 121-24; Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause*, pp. 17, 20, 51; Doctrine and Covenants 187:4-5; Dan Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night: The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), pp. 75-79.

³⁰ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 107-08, 135; Isaiah 18. Even before the Civil War, Americans like John McDonald taught that chapter 18 in the book of Isaiah prophesied about the United States, see John McDonald, *Isaiah's Message to the American Nation: A New Translation of Isaiah, Chapter XVIII* (Albany: E. & E. Hosford, 1814).

whose postmillennialist views either strengthened or became more secularised during the Civil War, Bickerton's premillennialist fervour only strengthened during the conflict, helping to bring hundreds of new converts into his religious fold. This is why Bickerton ordained a Quorum of Twelve Apostles during the conflict — to organise the top structure of the Church in preparation for converting the world. The Civil War was supposed to be the catalyst which propelled Bickerton to fulfil his prophetic mission — to complete the organisation of the true Church of Jesus Christ and help gather the lost tribes of Israel.³¹

The aftermath of the war, known as the Reconstruction era, further proved to Bickerton that the United States was only getting worse. He saw in the American West the potential for a new Zion. As Edward J. Blum noted, Bickerton was not alone: "The region was reinterpreted as a new Promised Land, a new Eden, and a new location of Christ's return."³² Interpreting a prophecy from the Book of Mormon, Bickerton held a unique belief that an American Indian Moses, called the Choice Seer, would arise from among his people, help convince the Indians of their Israelite heritage, along with the Christianity found in the Book of Mormon, and help usher in the millennial era. Like the Mormons, Bickerton wanted to establish a gathering place near Indian Territory so he could send missionaries to help convert the Indians and begin to gather all the righteous in preparation for God's judgment on the world. Bickerton would begin gathering the righteous into Zion (a term used to describe a place, a theocracy, and an era), and together they would build the New Jerusalem somewhere in the Americas (possibly in

³¹ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 123-46.

³² Edward J. Blum, "'To Doubt This Would Be to Doubt God': Reconstruction and the Decline of Providential Confidence," in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era*, eds. Wright and Dresser, p. 234.

the United States). In a sense, Bickerton could have agreed with Lyman Beecher that the “Millennium would commence in America,” and the fate of Christianity would be “decided in the West.”³³

Bickerton’s views did not form in a vacuum, but rather they directly correlated with Mormon eschatology and transatlantic millenarianism, much of which taught that the literal gathering of Israel would help inaugurate the Millennium. By the nineteenth century, various scholars and religious leaders had concluded that the American Indians were descended from the lost tribes of Israel, including Menasseh Ben-Israel, Roger Williams, Thomas Thorowgood, William Penn, James Adair, Elias Boudinot, Ethan Smith, and Joseph Smith. Other than Joseph Smith, Bickerton’s overall eschatology could best be compared to Elias Boudinot and Ethan Smith, both of whom believed the United States functioned as a second Israel and that the country would soon play a prominent role in helping to gather the Jews and lost tribes of Israel to Palestine.³⁴ Bickerton agreed that the American Indians were descendants of the House of Israel, but unlike Boudinot and Smith, Bickerton believed the United States had failed in its divine mission, which in turn provoked God’s wrath on the American people. The

³³ Ibid., p. 235; Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 50-51, 181-82, 218-21.

³⁴ Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 118-35; Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 182-83; Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), pp. 87-89; W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 1978), pp. 223-38; Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, pp. 79-83. See also Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West: A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, Preparatory to their Return to Their Beloved City, Jerusalem* (Trenton: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816), and Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews: Exhibiting the Destruction of Jerusalem; The Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel; The Present State of Judah and Israel; And an Address of the Prophet Isaiah Relative to Their Restoration* (Poultney: Smith & Shute, 1823).

Millennium was nigh at hand, but would only commence after the United States was destroyed, he believed.³⁵

Considering all this, Bickerton's views about the Civil War and Reconstruction reveal another reason why he is important to study within the historiography of American religion. He was a millenarian prophet who believed the Civil War was God's judgment on America so that the Indians could rise up and build the New Jerusalem in order to usher in the Millennium. He even believed that the great prophet of the last days would be Native American. This was a unique concept, especially in light of the fact that many religiously-minded Americans actually interpreted the Civil War as a postmillennialist chastisement on the country, while the federal government viewed the Indians as obstacles who stood in the way of modernisation and westward expansion. It is true that Brigham Young saw the Civil War in similar terms to Bickerton, that is, to see the conflict as a catalyst to bring about the Second Coming.³⁶ Yet Bickerton held more egalitarian views about American Indians, African Americans, and women, and what their expected roles would be during the end of time. They would be used to usher in the kingdom of God, Bickerton thought, and could even be ordained to do so.

Socially, Bickerton was somewhat of an anomaly, especially if one considers where he lived when he became a prophet. In the 1840s, he moved from Wheeling, Virginia to West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania (a borough just outside of Pittsburgh) as a coal miner, entering one of America's most industrious cities that thrived on steam power. Bickerton, therefore, like most other working-class men, worked hard and long hours, spending much of his time away from his home and family. The stark industrialisation of

³⁵ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 123-24, 181-82.

³⁶ Dan Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night*, pp. 163-77.

Pittsburgh and the surrounding area during the nineteenth century augmented the separation of gender roles. Unlike other cities where women started to work outside the home, Pittsburgh did not have as many jobs suited for females. Thus patriarchy was strongly reinforced in working-class families. Asymmetric families became the norm, with husbands controlling the finances and wives taking care of domestic duties. Men and women inhabited unequal spheres, men leading families they rarely saw or understood.³⁷ Despite the social atmosphere that Bickerton lived in, his religious leadership became more progressive over time, especially regarding his views of women, African Americans, and American Indians.

To examine these topics within the contexts of American religious history and Bickerton's life would take a voluminous study, but on the whole, Bickerton accepted and fostered women, blacks, and Indians in his church. Before and after the Civil War, socially and religiously, these peoples were usually marginalised. They were often

³⁷ Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (Cambridge: Perseus, 2003), pp. 107-10; S.J. Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), pp. 197-202. It is impossible to know to what extent Bickerton's occupation as a coal miner helped influence his independent spirit and religious mindset. However, we do know that he was an immigrant coal foreman in an industry that often threatened the lives of both himself and the men he oversaw. The threat of injury or death was a constant companion. He worked hard for meagre wages, yet somehow scrapped by to support his family and growing religious movement. Any of these aspects could have influenced his personality and religious life. Nevertheless, independent thinking, democratic ideals, dissent, and violence were found in several movements involving American coal miners. For an examination of the Molly Maguires, an infamous, nineteenth-century, secret society of miners involved in the anthracite coal industry of Eastern Pennsylvania, see Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For examinations of labor relations and violence in the American coal industry, see David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania 1840-68* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), and Perry K. Blatz, *Democratic Miners: Work and Labor Relations in the Anthracite Coal Industry, 1875-1925* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

considered second-class citizens, if citizens at all.³⁸ Bickerton however, believed the gospel was free for everyone, regardless of gender or race. All were equal in the eyes of God, he taught, and all could possess the power of the Holy Ghost, with all its spiritual gifts. In the Church, black and Indian males were not barred from holding priesthood offices, being considered the equals of whites. For women, although they could not hold the Melchizedek priesthood (or in other words, hold the office of elder or a higher office), they could be ordained to the office of deaconess, which technically was part of the Church's ministry, and they could attend church conferences and influence decisions made by the leadership, especially if they prophesied or exhibited spiritual manifestations that in some way directed the people. Against Victorian etiquette,

³⁸ For examinations of women in American religious history, see Ann Braude, *Sisters and Saints: Women and American Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America 1600-1850* (London: Routledge, 1999). For studies of women in Mormon history, see Rachel Cope, Amy Easton-Flake, Keith A. Erikson, and Lisa Olsen Tait, eds., *Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography* (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017), Kate Holbrook and Matthew Bowman, eds., *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright, eds., *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016). For examinations of African Americans in American religious history, see Anthony B. Pinn, *The African American Religious Experience in America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), and Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For studies of African Americans in Mormon history, see Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringham, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), Newell G. Bringham and Darron T. Smith, eds., *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), and Newell G. Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981). For examinations of American Indians in American religious history, see Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas, eds., *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). For a study of American Indians in Mormon history, see Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). For explorations of race in Mormon history, including American Indian and African American conceptions, see Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

Bickerton would even talk with women privately about religious matters, recognising that they controlled their own spiritual destiny. Bickerton may not have been a male feminist, but he certainly possessed progressive qualities that were outside the social norm. Even compared to mainstream Mormonism, his views were atypical. Women in the Mormon Church could not hold an ordained office, and it was considered inappropriate for them to exhibit charismatic spiritual gifts that were directed at the church or its leadership. Under Brigham Young's tutelage, the same held true for black members as well.³⁹

What is clear is that Bickerton's religious mindset paralleled several facets of American religious culture. He developed within the milieu of nineteenth-century American Christianity, but he was an independent thinker who established his own innovative movement of religious dissent.

William Bickerton and Mormon History

The story of William Bickerton and the Bickertonites has been overshadowed by the voluminous scholarship written about other Latter Day Saint groups, most notably the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Ironically, even scholarship about Mormonism's smaller movements, like the Whitmerites, Rigdonites, Strangites, Hedrickites, and Cutlerites, has eclipsed Bickerton's church. This stems from several factors. More particularly, the LDS Church and Community of Christ are much larger churches that can trace a direct connection to the first Mormon prophet, Joseph

³⁹ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. viii, 333, 336.

Smith, Jr. The largest movement was carried forward by Brigham Young. At Smith's death, Young was president of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and shortly thereafter he led the majority of the Saints into the Salt Lake Valley. Young maintained the same title of Smith's church and held a convincing claim that he was the rightful successor. He also was a towering religious icon, a prominent political figure, and the most successful western pioneer in American history.⁴⁰ The second largest movement was sustained by Joseph Smith III. Although not taking leadership of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints until 1860, he was the deceased Mormon prophet's son, and received support from several individuals who had personally known and followed his father, including his mother, Emma. Smith III took an interest in national politics as well, especially when he helped advise the U.S. Congress on how to curb Mormon polygamy. Although he never achieved the political stature of Young, Smith III led the second-largest Latter Day Saint denomination and achieved some noteworthy national publicity.⁴¹ The smaller Latter Day Saint movements, like the Whitmerites and Rigdonites, received close examination by scholars over the years because their leaders, David Whitmer and Sidney Rigdon, were close confidants of Joseph Smith, Jr. In addition, the Strangites and Cutlerites received significant exploration because they both promoted what were often considered scandalous projects. Both religious movements practiced polygamy, and Strang received a coronation as king of Beaver Island, served in the Michigan legislature as a state representative, and was

⁴⁰ For the most recent, critically acclaimed treatment of Brigham Young, see Turner, *Brigham Young*.

⁴¹ For critically acclaimed treatments of Joseph Smith III, see Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), and Roger D. Launius, *Father Figure: Joseph Smith III and the Creation of the Reorganized Church* (Independence: Herald House, 1990).

assassinated by two former followers who after committing the murder, immediately escaped to safety on board a U.S. Navy vessel. No doubt these are fascinating, eccentric stories guaranteed to garner attention. There are several other Latter Day Saint denominations, and surprisingly, scholars have produced in-depth scholarship on most of them.

For instance, Roger D. Launius examined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (1988) and *Father Figure: Joseph Smith III and the Creation of the Reorganized Church* (1990). Roger Van Noord's *King of Beaver Island: The Life and Assassination of James J. Strang* (1988) and Vickie Cleverley Speek's *God Has Made Us a Kingdom: James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (2006) appraised James Strang's large and quixotic religious movement in Wisconsin and Michigan. F. Mark McKiernan in *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer 1793-1876* (1971) and Richard S. Van Wagoner in *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (1994) examined Rigdon's leadership in three Latter Day Saint churches: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion. Biloine Whiting Young's *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler* (2002) reviewed the Cutlerite movement. Ronald E. Romig in *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (2014) examined the Mormon and Whitmerite movements from the perspective of John Whitmer, a church historian and one of the witnesses of the gold plates. Steven L. Shields's *Divergent Paths of the Restoration: A History of the Latter Day Saint Movement* (1975) has gone through four editions and has highlighted the ever-growing Latter Day Saint schisms. He discussed Bickerton and

the Church of Jesus Christ, but only briefly, and his summary of Bickerton's influence over the Church was short and generalised. Similar to Shields, Roger Launius and Linda Thatcher edited *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (1994) and John C. Hamer and Newell G. Bringhurst edited *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (2007). Launius and Thatcher offered no contribution about Bickerton's movement, and similar to Shields, Hamer and Bringhurst provided only a brief summary of Bickerton's leadership and influence over his church. Certainly, the list can continue, but this is a good snapshot of major monographs that have been produced on the Mormon diaspora.⁴²

So why has William Bickerton and his church, which is now the third-largest Latter Day Saint denomination, been largely overlooked? As discussed in *William Bickerton: Forgotten Latter Day Prophet*, the history of Bickerton's life and church is not dull. Rather, his movement is filled with captivating and significant episodes that reveal much about the Latter Day Saint past, along with America's broader religious history.⁴³ Arguably, this topic should garner much more attention. Gary R. Entz, the first

⁴² Publication details of the books mentioned above about the Mormon diaspora: Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Roger D. Launius, *Father Figure: Joseph Smith III and the Creation of the Reorganized Church* (Independence: Herald House, 1990); Roger Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island: The Life and Assassination of James J. Strang* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Vickie Cleverley Speek, *God Has Made Us a Kingdom: James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006); F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer 1793-1876* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1971); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994); Biloine Whiting Young, *Obscure Believers: The Mormon Schism of Alpheus Cutler* (St. Paul: Pogo Press, 2002); Ronald E. Romig, *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2014); Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration: A History of the Latter Day Saint Movement* (Nauvoo: New Nauvoo Neighbor Press, 1975); Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, eds., *Scattering of the Saints: Schism Within Mormonism* (Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2007). Paul J. Gutjahr in his book, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 61-85, also discussed the Mormon diaspora after Joseph Smith's death, where he briefly mentioned William Bickerton and the organisation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

⁴³ Stone, *William Bickerton*, p. viii.

professionally trained historian to examine the Bickertonites and their migration into Kansas, offered advice to future historians in his article, “Zion Valley: The Mormon Origins of St. John, Kansas” (2001). He stated, “What remains a fertile field for historical inquiry, however, are the smaller dissenting restoration churches that separated from the two large church organizations in Salt Lake City and Independence. One of these nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint groups saw a potential Zion in Kansas [the Bickertonites].”⁴⁴

In *William Bickerton*, I hypothesise why Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ have been overlooked. Here I will examine this hypothesis in greater detail, while placing my research within the context of the evolving historiography of the Church and Mormon history. The lack of scholarship could stem from the fact that few people know the history of Bickerton and his church. Even members of the Church of Jesus Christ do not know much about their church’s founder or their church’s history, hampering the possibility for others to appreciate it. A large reason for this is that neither the Church of Jesus Christ, nor any independent scholar, has ever produced a professional or comprehensive history of the Church. In 1945, William H. Cadman, president and historian of the Church, published the first substantial history, entitled *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ*. However, Cadman was not a trained historian. His history does offer some significant and valuable information, but the book is predominately a compilation of direct quotations from the Church’s minute books, sprinkled with vignettes and personal reflections offered by the author. Even though Cadman attempted to present the Church’s history, he largely ignored William Bickerton’s contributions. There is no doubt that Bickerton, who founded the movement and

⁴⁴ Entz, “Zion Valley,” p. 98.

dedicated the majority of his life to fostering the Church, played a significant role throughout its history. This obvious neglect appears to have been intentional. Cadman's father, William Cadman Sr., battled with Bickerton for over two decades for control of the Church's presidency — a battle which Cadman Sr. eventually won. Considering Cadman Jr.'s bias toward his father, along with the possibility that he tried to avoid any controversy by omitting much of the Church's turbulent history, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* is essentially heritage history (also known as faithful or traditional history), following the Victorian tradition of hagiographic historical writing that is all too prevalent in early Mormon historiography.⁴⁵ Although not as comprehensive as B.H. Roberts's *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

⁴⁵ Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, eds., *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 5-9. According to George D. Smith, the term *faithful history* "has at least two meanings: history written to express and support religious faith, and history that attempts to be faithful to the past. In the Mormon community these two perspectives are usually labeled 'traditional' and 'new,' and between them lies an on-going dialogue about the appropriate way to portray the Mormon past," see George D. Smith, *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), p. vii. In this commentary, I use the term *heritage history* because the Bickertonite church has supported not only historical writing that reinforces religious faith, but writing that supports church heritage (i.e. abstract traditions and qualities) that has been passed down over generations, most notably the idea that the Church has had a clear transition of spiritual and ecclesiastical authority throughout its history, originating from Joseph Smith, then continuing through Sidney Rigdon, William Bickerton, and William Cadman Sr. (and so on). My publications demonstrate that this is not exactly the case, especially regarding the power-struggle that occurred between Bickerton and Cadman over the Church's leadership. I attempted to offer a historical consciousness that "no longer listens sanctimoniously to the voice that reaches out from the past but, in reflecting on it, replaces it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value proper to it," see H.G. Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 111. George D. Smith's book, *Faithful History*, even though it is now almost thirty years old, is an excellent overview of the challenges historians of Mormonism continue to face. Other good examinations about this topic are Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young, eds., *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Louis Midgley, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, vol. 2, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 1990), David E. Bohn, "Our Own Agenda: A Critique of the Methodology of the New Mormon History," *Sunstone* 14 (June 1990), pp. 45-49, and David E. Bohn, "No Higher Ground: Objective History is an Illusive Chimera," *Sunstone* 8 (May-June 1983), pp. 26-32. The tensions that exist between producing idealistic and professional history are not exclusive to the field of Mormon history, but exist in the field of Christian history as well, see Kenneth L. Parker and Erick H. Moser, eds., *The Rise of Historical Consciousness Among the Christian Churches: Studies in Religion and the Social Order* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013).

(1930),⁴⁶ Cadman Jr.'s history is similar in that he presented an idealistic portrayal of the Bickertonites, failed to examine in detail or at all important episodes of church history, and structured the book in a convoluted manner. In his article, "The Bickertonites: Schism and Reunion in a Restoration Church" (2006), Gary Entz argued that Cadman Jr. "wrote William Bickerton and the western branch in St. John out of much of the Church's chronicles. The result has been that the memory of Bickerton has become obscured within his own church."⁴⁷ As my scholarship demonstrates, I agree with Entz's conclusion.

Over time, others in the Church of Jesus Christ attempted to write more honest examinations of the Church's history. Unfortunately, they received opposition from the Church's leadership. Documentation about these incidents are scant, but one example is telling. During the 1980s, Idris Martin, the assistant general church historian, transcribed large segments of the Church's early minute books for publication. However, in a revealing note to Robert "Bob" Watson, the general church historian, Martin expressed his frustration that the Church's leadership ultimately prevented the church historians from publishing the minutes. He remarked, "Bob, I am sure you have considered how strange it is, that we have had so much opposition about our history being published." Martin then presented examples from the past that he believed paralleled their current situation. "Brother William Cadman Sr. was asked by the conference of 1901, to write a brief history of the Church, to be read at the 40th anniversary celebration to be held in 1902," Martin reminded Watson. "When he

⁴⁶ Publication details: B.H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930).

⁴⁷ Entz, "The Bickertonites," p. 44.

[Cadman] was asked to read the history, he confessed that he had not written anything on that line, then related many incidents of the past, that 'would not have made a very pleasant history.'"⁴⁸ Martin gave other examples:

'A considerable manuscript' was presented to the General Conference of 1903, by Bro. Bickerton, but it was rejected, because a part of it covered the period of time, (2[2] years) in which [h]e was separated from the Church. After a few decades had passed, Conference again asked Bro. William Cadman Jr. to write the History of the Church. The Church did publish Bro. Will's history of 413 pages in 1945. But Bro. Will no doubt, did remember the words of his father about the unpleasantness of the past, and did not write about the many times our brothers were misled by revelations that were not of God. The serious public quarrells [*sic*] and failures, even the reorganization of the Church in 1904. The incredible claims of greatness made by Brother Bickerton.⁴⁹

In the end, Martin offered this conclusion: "The only way you can learn about our Church History is to read these 400 pages I have given you. They cover only the first 57 years of our history...I have tried to write the[s]e pages as an exact copy of the minutes written by our brothers of old...(We cannot change what they have written)."⁵⁰

Throughout the transcription Martin added his own comments, some that even displayed his bias about certain historical events. Martin was a believing historian who sometimes chose to interpret historical topics or events with faithful subjectivity rather than professional objectivity. Nevertheless, his efforts to preserve the Church's history eventually bore fruit.

In 2002, fifty-seven years after William H. Cadman published the first official history of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church published, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ, Volume 2: Covering the Restoration to the Year 1960* (2002). The book presented another heritage history — this time into the mid-twentieth century — offering

⁴⁸ Idris A. Martin and John E. Mancini, eds., "The History of the Church of Jesus Christ: May 25, 1851 Thru October 7, 1905 along with commentary by Idris A. Martin - Assistant General Church Historian," in The Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

several vignettes and personal reflections not so different from Cadman Jr.'s history. Yet despite this narrow approach, the book did utilise Martin's transcription of the Church's early minute books. Even though the transcription was minimally referenced, this nonetheless demonstrated a growing willingness by the Church to use resources created by its past historians. *Volume 2* also offered new details about the early Church never before discussed. For the first time, an official church publication quoted William Bickerton's autobiography, the "considerable manuscript" mentioned by Idris Martin in his note to Bob Watson. The book also discussed in more detail controversial topics such as Bickerton's short associations with early Mormon leaders, Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young, and albeit superficially, it quickly addressed the adultery allegation against William Bickerton, along with the twenty-two-year feud between Bickerton and William Cadman Sr.⁵¹

At some point in the late twentieth century, the Church of Jesus Christ lost custody of its early minute books to the Lamb Foundation for Research and Religious Studies under precarious circumstances. John Mancini, who was an elder in the Church, had obtained the minute books from the general historian, Robert Watson, in order to conduct research and digitally preserve the documents. However, not long after, Mancini left the Church due to a serious disagreement with the apostles, and for undisclosed personal reasons, kept the minute books. The Church never sued Mancini over custody of the minutes, so eventually he obtained outright ownership. Despite this unfortunate episode, he still preserved the minute books by using high quality archival methods, including digitally scanning the pages. Also, he established the Lamb

⁵¹ Robert A. Watson, et al., eds., *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002), pp. 2:23-50.

Foundation for Research and Religious Studies to foster research in Hebrew, Christian, and Mormon religion and history.⁵² Even though the Church of Jesus Christ does not have possession of the early minute books, it did preserve Martin's transcription of the minutes in its archive. Neither John Mancini nor the Church of Jesus Christ ever published the early church minutes, but they are available for research to those who receive special approval. Thankfully, I received access to the Church's archive, and I received digital copies and transcriptions of several minute books and documents from the Lamb Foundation.

Time may have healed old wounds, allowing me the opportunity to conduct research on William Bickerton and the early years of the Church of Jesus Christ. After all, I am not only a historian, but a deacon in the Church of Jesus Christ who chose to write the first professional biography of the Church's founder. Yet I admit that holding an ordained office in the Church while choosing the Bickertonites and the Mormon movement as a focus of study does complicate my personal life. I often find myself at odds with certain traditions and heritage history celebrated by the Church. I recognise that my personal relationships with church members might be disrupted if I do not act appropriately. Obviously, I have to choose wisely when to express my thoughts publicly. My church membership has never been in danger, but I have to remain cognisant of the fact that my research does contradict and shed new light on the Church's traditional history. Most church members have been receptive, even excited, by my research, but there are others who have openly expressed concerns. Some have family reputations to protect, while others believe that any unflattering historical facts about the early church

⁵² The Lamb Foundation for Research and Religious Studies is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

are better left hidden. It has been difficult to dispel fictions contained in the traditional and oral histories of the Church from the minds of individuals, especially because this heritage history has been engrained in the Church's culture for over a century.

This struggle is best portrayed by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles's response to my book. After writing the first five chapters of the biography, I offered the publication rights to the Church of Jesus Christ. I had originally agreed to do this as a condition of my access to the church's archives. However, after the apostles read the first five chapters, I did not receive a clear answer as to whether they wanted the Church to publish the manuscript. The apostles expressed concerns as to how I interpreted some historical events, especially some that may not reflect positively on the early Church or certain individuals. Additionally, some of the apostles and I did not agree on certain historical "facts," such as whether Joseph Smith practiced polygamy,⁵³ or whether William Bickerton believed in the Doctrine and Covenants as a member of Sidney Rigdon's and Brigham Young's churches,⁵⁴ both of which I stated affirmatively. Based on these disagreements and the non-consensus that seemed to emerge from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles as to how to proceed with my manuscript, I asked permission from the Church's general historian to publish my manuscript independently, which he

⁵³ For a detailed account of the ongoing arguments whether Smith practiced polygamy, see Brian C. Hales, "Joseph Smith: Monogamist or Polygamist?" *Interpreter* 25 (2017), pp. 117-56. For in-depth studies of Joseph Smith and Mormon polygamy, see Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), Todd M. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy, Volume 1: History* (Sandy: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy, Volume 2: History* (Sandy: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy, Volume 3: Theology* (Sandy: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Knopf, 2017).

⁵⁴ The literature published by the Church of Jesus Christ does not engage with the question whether Bickerton, at any time, believed in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C). This can give the impression that Bickerton did not accept the text. However, Bickerton did believe in the D&C when he associated with Sidney Rigdon's and Brigham Young's churches, and after he started the Church of Jesus Christ, it is clear he still believed in some of the revelations found in the D&C.

granted. In return, I agreed to allow the apostles to read the completed manuscript, with the hope of curbing any surprises before the book was published. Nevertheless, once the Quorum of Twelve Apostles learned that Signature Books expressed interest in publishing the biography of Bickerton, they too expressed concerns not unlike their predecessors. In January 2016, I received a letter from the apostles that revealed more of their apprehensions about my research project:

The Apostles as the ordained spiritual leaders of the Church have not had the opportunity to review your completed manuscript on "Bickerton." Yet we are under the impression you may be close to publishing same. This places us in an uncomfortable position as we are prayerful not to allow negative thinking or a casting of bad light upon the Church and its operation as commissioned by Jesus Christ, the son of God Almighty. Knowing that during the days of the [Kansas] Colony, there was unrest existing between our two church leaders, namely William Cadman and William Bickerton. The Church leaders to this day have always been careful not to bring reproach on either Brother, nor have we researched their differences as it serves little purpose in today's church atmosphere. Brother Daniel, it is our hope not to blemish the Church in any way nor to possibly upset our church membership by exposing these individual differences of two prominent church leaders. The Church wishes not to discredit either of these early church leaders as there was sincerity in them as well, even though they may have handled their differences differently than we would today.

Understandably, the apostles expressed concerns that a professional history about William Bickerton and the early Church could potentially unsettle some church members along with the status quo of the Church's official historiography. The apostles are ecclesiastical leaders, so their principal objective is to foster faith rather than produce professional history. Nevertheless, unlike the apostles of the past, the current Quorum of Twelve did not hinder the publication of the book. They merely offered this proposition: "It is the wish of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles that this manuscript not be published at this time, but that you allow us to review it in its entirety and discuss with you any areas that may be found concerning to the Church today."⁵⁵ On reflection, I decided to keep my research independent from the Church's oversight. I did not want to risk compromising the historical integrity of the book by allowing ecclesiastical leaders

⁵⁵ Correspondence, Quorum of Twelve Apostles to Daniel Stone, January 21, 2016. Letter in possession of Daniel Stone.

to offer critiques based on what they believed was appropriate for public consumption. Rather, I borrowed an approach employed by another believing historian, Richard Lyman Bushman, when he wrote *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005). In the book, he revealed Smith's "mistakes and flaws," believing that "covering up errors makes no sense. ... Most readers do not believe in, nor are they interested in, perfection. Flawless characters are neither attractive nor useful."⁵⁶ As Bushman noted, it is important for historians, regardless of any personal convictions they may have, to look at their subjects as objectively as possible. Ultimately, the apostles agreed not to frustrate the publication and promotion of my book, but they chose not to support it either. They made it clear that they do not agree with my approach to church history. In general, they are standing aloof from my research.

My experience with the apostles was not all that different from other past historians of the Latter Day Saint movement. The historiography of Mormonism is filled with similar episodes, none more important than Leonard J. Arrington's tenure as LDS Church historian. For ten years, between 1972-1982, Arrington gained prestige for championing the school of "new Mormon history." Historian Robert Flanders, who wrote an important essay about the movement, asserted that the new Mormon history "revealed a shift from parochialism and polemics to a more humane and universal history rooted in such 'humanistic and scientific disciplines' as 'philosophy, social psychology, economics, and religious studies.'"⁵⁷ Flanders also attested that the new school of thought opened doors to studying other Latter Day Saint denominations.

⁵⁶ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. ix-x; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), p. x.

⁵⁷ Robert Flanders, "Some Reflections on the New Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9, no. 1 (1974), p. 35.

Thomas G. Alexander, another important historian of the movement, noted that members of the school consisted mostly of active, devout Mormons interested in using their professional training to better understand their religious heritage.⁵⁸

Under Arrington's tutelage, the LDS History Division interviewed 800 people; transcribed 3,000 church documents; wrote more than 350 articles, book chapters, and reviews; and published 20 influential books. The books included Dean C. Jessee's *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (1974), Leonard J. Arrington's, Feramorz Y. Fox's, and Dean L. May's *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (1976), and David Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (1977). The division also helped produce two of the most important books in modern Mormon historiography: James B. Allen's and Glen M. Leonard's *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (1976), and Leonard J. Arrington's and David Bitton's *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (1979).⁵⁹

The success of the LDS Church History Division, however, could not curb the scepticism of certain LDS general authorities, including apostles Ezra Taft Benson and Boyd K. Packer. Benson feared the consequences of humanising church leaders, while Packer feared that church historians revealed too much information, famously stating,

⁵⁸ Thomas G. Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 3 (1986), pp. 25-49; Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, pp. 66-67. Publication details of the books mentioned above: Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974); Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); David Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo: BYU Press, 1977); James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976); Leonard J. Arrington and David Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

“Some things that are true are not very useful.”⁶⁰ Under their influence and direction, Arrington and seven other scholars from the History Division received transfers to Brigham Young University, where they joined the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History. In addition, the LDS archives began to once again restrict access to its collections and attempted to quell scholarship already underway. Although the move to BYU offered more academic freedom to Arrington and the other scholars, it nonetheless demonstrated that the LDS Church wanted to retreat to more traditional heritage (faithful) history. As a result, Arrington was disappointed. He privately wrote, “Our great experiment in church-sponsored history has proved to be, if not a failure, at least not an unqualified success.”⁶¹

Even though Arrington had to retreat to BYU, the legacy of the new Mormon history stayed intact. By the twenty-first century, the LDS Church began sponsoring projects Arrington would no doubt have supported, including the construction of the Church History Library and the establishment of the Church Historian’s Press, which has published several influential titles such as volumes of the *Joseph Smith Papers*, *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women’s History* (2016), and *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (2017).⁶² The parallels between my work on William Bickerton and Arrington’s scholarship are apparent. Arrington helped produce scholarship about the Mormon past

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 67; Gregory A. Prince, *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), p. 169.

⁶¹ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, p. 68; Prince, pp. 328-371.

⁶² Publication details of the books mentioned above: Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women’s History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016); Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017).

that improved Latter Day Saint history and altered the future of American religious history, all while facing scepticism from church leaders.

Specifically within Mormon history, my scholarship offers new and extensive arguments about William Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ. One of the most important contributions is that the Church of Jesus Christ is not a direct continuation of Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ or his Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion. This assumption has been perpetuated for over a decade. For instance, in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (2007), Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer wrote, "The Church of Jesus Christ with Headquarters in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, is the primary extant branch of Rigdonite Mormonism."⁶³ At the Church History Museum in Salt Lake City, the main exhibit includes a display that illustrates the succession crisis at the death of Joseph Smith, which again gives the illusion that Bickerton's church is an extant branch of Rigdonite Mormonism. This, however, is not completely accurate. The Church of Jesus Christ's official histories briefly explain that Bickerton separated from Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young to establish another church, while Gary R. Entz in his article, "The Bickertonites: Schism and Reunion in a Restoration Church" (2006), correctly asserted, "Bickerton severed his affiliation with Rigdon."⁶⁴ These works, however, do not discuss in detail why and how Bickerton separated from Rigdon and Young to establish a new Latter Day Saint church. My article, "The Rocky Road to Prophethood: William Bickerton's Emergence as an American Prophet," does exactly this. The first twenty pages are dedicated to exploring Bickerton's associations with Rigdon and Young, and why he chose to leave these branches of Mormonism. The

⁶³ Bringhurst and Hamer, eds., *Scattering of the Saints: Schism Within Mormonism*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Entz, "The Bickertonites," p. 2.

article also explains how Bickerton had to re-evaluate his thoughts regarding the prophetic authority of Smith, Rigdon, and Young, a topic never before explored by historians. Overall, the article concludes that Bickerton's church is not a continuation of either Rigdon's or Young's churches. Rather, the Church is a separate, independent religious movement that attempted to clarify, correct, and adapt doctrines of early Mormonism to fit the beliefs and needs of Bickerton and his followers.⁶⁵

Another contribution my scholarship offers is that it clarifies the year Bickerton formed his church. Bickerton established his church at some point in 1852,⁶⁶ but every single historical work, including the Church of Jesus Christ's official histories, place the date in July 1862. At first glance, this contribution may seem trivial, but by placing the birth of Bickerton's church in 1852, it demonstrates that the Church began slightly earlier than the second-largest Latter Day Saint denomination, the Community of Christ, which technically began forming in late 1851 but did not become a unified church until 1860.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it demonstrates that Bickerton's church was a direct counteraction to Brigham Young's 1852 public sanctioning of plural marriage. Lastly, by recognising that the Church started in 1852, a ten-year historical gap is filled. This last point is important. By showing that Bickerton's church started in 1852, it becomes clear that Bickerton and the Church had a decade to develop and mature. During this time, the Church experienced a powerful spiritual revival, Bickerton was officially recognised as a

⁶⁵ Stone, "The Rocky Road to Prophethood," pp. 27-29.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 15-23; Daniel P. Stone, "Opening the Windows of Heaven: The Bickertonite Spiritual Revival 1856-1858," *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no 1 (January 2018), pp. 1-2; Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 53-73.

⁶⁷ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, pp. 85-135.

prophet by his followers, and the Church clearly outlined some of its millenarian beliefs. No one had ever before explored these major events in Bickertonite history.

Most prominently, volumes one and two of *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (1945 & 2002), along with Entz's scholarship and Bringhurst's and Hamer's *Scattering of the Saints*, state that Bickerton formally "organised" or established his church in 1862.⁶⁸ What seems to have confused historians is the terminology Bickerton and his followers used. When Bickerton ordained the Quorum of Twelve Apostles on July 7, 1862, he said that his church was "organised." In chapter seven of *William Bickerton*, the organisation of Bickerton's church is discussed. In Bickerton's mind, the ordination of twelve apostles signalled that his church finally held a leadership that resembled the original Christian church found in the New Testament:

As far as Bickerton was concerned, the church was now fully organized and ready to venture out while there was still time to rescue their fellow gentiles who were pure of heart and to follow the risen Lord's intention that they "assist my people, the remnant of Jacob [American Indians], and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem" (3 Ne. 21:22–23).⁶⁹

By July 1862, Bickerton instituted all the ordained offices of his church, except for the office of deaconess, which would not be proposed until April 1863.⁷⁰ Therefore, the term "organisation" did not mean that Bickerton formed his church in 1862. Rather, it meant that the Quorum of Twelve Apostles received a formal ordination, officially filling all the top leadership positions of the Church.

⁶⁸ William H. Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela: Church of Jesus Christ, 1945), p. 1:34; David Jordan, "Origin of the Church of Jesus Christ," in *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, ed. Robert A. Watson, et al., (Monongahela: Church of Jesus Christ, 2002), pp. 2:37-38; Larry Watson, "The Church of Jesus Christ (Headquartered in Monongahela, Pennsylvania), Its History and Doctrine," in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism Within Mormonism*, p. 194.

⁶⁹ Stone, *William Bickerton*, p. 144.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ deserve more attention from scholars of Mormon history. The religious movement is rich in unexplored topics and correlates well with the larger subjects of Mormon and American religious history. My scholarship on Bickerton can act as a good starting point for scholars. The footnotes alone offer new avenues to tread. In response to a paper I presented about Bickerton at the 2016 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, D. Michael Quinn,⁷¹ an important scholar of Mormon history, even stated, “I was pleased to see Stone’s citation to a book unknown to me...Moreover, I was very interested to see his citations from two manuscript-archives I have never visited: one in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and another in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Because I knew nothing about Bickerton, everything Stone’s presentation said about this early Mormon’s experiences and perspectives after 1844 was new to me, as I assume it was to most of those attending this session of the Sunstone Symposium. And I appreciate that contribution to our understanding.”⁷² More research needs to be done on the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, but by focusing on Bickerton, I gained a unique perspective on the Church’s history that could not have been obtained otherwise.

⁷¹ In some circles, D. Michael Quinn (PhD, Yale 1975) is a celebrated historian of Mormonism, but in others, his scholarship is viewed with scepticism, especially by staunch believers who idealise Mormon history. His branded reputation stems in part from his excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1993. Before that, he was a popular history professor at Brigham Young University from 1976-1988. After he separated from his wife due to his homosexuality, he resigned as a faculty member because he felt he was being ostracised by the university. He later became a member of what would be known as the “September Six,” a group of six individuals who were excommunicated from the LDS Church for publishing controversial history and opinions about the religion and its leaders. Regardless, his scholarship is still prominent in Mormon historiography. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Noted historian still believes in Mormonism, but now as an outsider,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 1, 2013.

⁷² D. Michael Quinn, “Comments by D. Michael Quinn about Daniel P. Stone’s ‘William Bickerton v. Brigham Young: The Case Against Polygamy,’ Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, July 2016.” Response paper in possession of Daniel Stone.

Why Biography?

In numerous academic environments, especially history departments, biography (also referred to as life-writing) has been snubbed. To be fair, biography is indeed an elusive craft that can borrow techniques from both history and fiction. Paula R. Backscheider, in her award-winning book, *Reflections on Biography* (1999), offered this explanation as to why biography can scare academics: “The recent sensational, very public discussion of when it is legitimate for a biographer to borrow from the techniques of the fiction writer is likely to caution and inform the professional biographer but to terrify the academic one. For an academic to be accused of ‘making up things’ or ‘conflating’ quotations and evidence is the most serious charge that can be leveled against him or her and may discredit that person forever.”⁷³ Good biographers know they are creating narratives based on their selection of documentation; that they are attempting to understand the motives of people they never knew; and that they are establishing cause and effect and other relationships by emphasising or subordinating sources over others. By doing so, they write histories that contain assumptions about people’s motivations and feelings, which to sceptics, could be viewed as warped reflections of reality. It is clear that everything hinges on how a biographer constructs a narrative.⁷⁴ Academic historians, therefore, are not completely in error when they caution against writing biography, especially to other historians at the start of their academic careers. Although biography is based on historical documentation, it can often be partisan or speculative in nature.

⁷³ Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, p. xix.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

However, if history departments ignore biography altogether, or if they completely restrict budding historians from indulging in the craft, they take part in a futile endeavour that not only harms those aspiring biographers, but the field of history in general. For one, to state that biography and history are entirely separate crafts is disingenuous. Historians today are often more interested in studying trends and processes over events and individuals. Yet Derek Beales aptly stated that examining historical trends, although important, is deprived if biographical considerations are not taken into account. Scholars need to remember that trends “are powered and directed by men,” that “history is concerned with trends as they affect people,” and that “individuals’ reactions to trends, even the reactions of those who never gain the woods of freedom, constitute the historian’s prime material.”⁷⁵ Therefore, biography is history. As Peter C. Hoffer explained, biographers are a special breed of historians who are devoted to understanding how a person lived, talked, and progressed; how a person reflected and was formed by wider trends; and how a person influenced the world around them. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan agree as well, for they defined biography “as a research area [that] belongs to history” and “a variety of historiography.”⁷⁶

Secondly, to fault biography for its speculative and partisan nature is to ignore history’s own fraught craft. There are few plain facts in history. Most historical facts are only known to us because individuals with subjective perspectives decided to record their own thoughts and perceptions. Those that were preserved became “facts,” while

⁷⁵ Derek Beales, “History and Biography: An Inaugural Lecture,” in *History and Biography: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales*, eds. T.C.W. Planning and David Cannadine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 282-83.

⁷⁶ Peter Charles Hoffer, *Clio among the Muses: Essays on History and the Humanities* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), p. 88; Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, eds., *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 3-4.

those that were not became “speculation.” Moreover, those who recorded these “facts” chose what information to include and exclude. Pure historical objectivity is therefore a farce. Historians can never be entirely objective simply because the sources they use contain so many prejudices already. That is why biography plays such an important role in the field of history. Historians must study the people who created the records if they want to properly use them to examine trends and processes. Biography is no more partisan or speculative than the documentation historians use to formulate their own narratives or analyses. Beales even concluded, “One of the principal uses of a biography is to help us appraise the evidence left by the subject. Where a biography is not available, the historian should still enquire into the character, experiences and attitudes of those on whose testimony he relied.”⁷⁷ Biographies are paramount to helping historians understand and contextualise documentation left by individuals. As a result, biography is a foundational genre of history.

Thirdly, the inherent problems of biography are also its greatest strengths. The tension between a biographer’s drive to objectively assemble facts and the urge to create a moving narrative by piecing together random parts of a person’s life actually propels a story forward and opens the door for a biographer to make insightful interpretations. As Richard Holmes stated, “Both instincts are vital, and a biography is dead without either of them.” Holmes did admit that these two instincts form an uneasy union, but they are nonetheless essential.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Beales, “History and Biography: An Inaugural Lecture,” pp. 277, 281.

⁷⁸ Richard Holmes, “The Proper Study?”, in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, eds. Peter France and William St. Clair (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 16-17.

On a fourth point, in the current market of information, more people read biography than any other nonfiction or literary genre. Backscheider stated, “The last literary genre to be read by a very wide cross-section of people is biography,” where “the readers of these books defy usual marketing categories based on age, sex, occupation, education, race, and class.”⁷⁹ Simply put, if historians ignore biography, they miss a worthwhile chance to educate a wide audience — the general public — which also includes other historians and humanities scholars. As Ian McKay, Debby Applegate, and Daniel Meister suggested, scholars need to ask themselves an important question: Is there anything wrong with producing scholarship that is more readable and has wider appeal? If they do, they open their work to new audiences, generating more interest in their fields, along with more revenue for themselves and the institutions that employ them. If they do not, they possibly entrench themselves in academic circles that may very well nurture pretentiousness. History departments should take note, as the relevance of their departments are increasingly questioned by administrators who are pressured to focus on a university’s bottom line.⁸⁰

Lastly, biographies create new historiography and help examine and contextualise the old. As historians are free to challenge other scholars about certain historical trends and processes, so too are biographers free to reassess the significance of a person’s life, Hoffer explained.⁸¹ Biography can encompass not only a person’s life,

⁷⁹ Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, p. xiii.

⁸⁰ Daniel R. Meister, “The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography,” *History Compass* 16, no. 1 (2018), p. 7. See also Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000), p. 617, and Debby Applegate, “From academic historian to popular biographer: Musings on the practical poetics of biography,” in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, eds. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 191-92.

⁸¹ Hoffer, *Clio among the Muses*, p. 109.

but the overall history of the times he or she represented, the trends a person helped start or perpetuate, and the historical works an individual inspired. As a result, biography can carry on debates about historical consciousness.

Renders and de Haan support this point by arguing that biography should exploit the tools of microhistory “in order to place the broader historiography in proper perspective, and perhaps also to alter it a little.”⁸² Microhistory is a subfield of history that is concerned with finding unique events that create new interpretations about larger trends. There are two competing views of microhistory. Most microhistorians are interested in the first approach. By conducting microscopic studies of particular historical contexts one can find new information to help answer larger questions, ultimately proving that a close examination of a historical subject can be representative of a larger story. The second approach is much narrower, in that microhistorians should investigate all facets of events and phenomena in magnified detail, and ignore larger contexts around their focus of study. By doing so, it is argued, microhistorians will not be tainted by preconceived ideas about broader factors, allowing them to uncover how society actually functioned in people’s lives.⁸³ However, I do not entirely agree with Render and de Haan that the best way for biography to place historiography in its proper perspective is by discovering how a person was distinctive to their time rather than understanding how a person was representative of their time. Biography utilising microhistory should do both. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (1990), did precisely this by historically contextualising Martha Ballard’s vague diary entries. Using

⁸² Renders and de Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, p. 6.

⁸³ Ibid., 5-6; Meister, “The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography,” p. 5.

Ballard's diary as the foundational primary source, Ulrich demonstrated that Ballard was both a product of her time and an exceptional female figure. Ulrich offered detailed portraits of rural New England life during the early American Republic and depicted how Ballard travelled through harsh climates to deliver up to fifty babies a year while avoiding high maternal death rates. Ulrich brought Ballard's life out of obscurity to reveal that she actually led a highly influential life within her community, an uncommon experience for most New England women. Ulrich succeeded in what Meister argued is the best way for historical biography to employ microhistory: it "should alternate its gaze between the subject and their context, exploring the ways in which they interact."⁸⁴

At times I utilised microhistory while examining Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ. Some entries in the church minute books, along with Bickerton's autobiography, are vague, but by connecting these entries with the intimate and larger historical settings surrounding Bickerton's life, it was possible to piece together a compelling narrative that demonstrates that Bickerton and his church were both products of their time and trailblazers within Mormonism and American religion. For instance, in Bickerton's autobiography, he briefly mentioned that while under Sidney Rigdon's tutelage, he learned that women were taught in the LDS Church that they had to depend upon their husbands to receive the highest form of salvation. By contextualising this statement, it was possible to juxtapose Bickerton's progressive views about women with his decision to join the LDS Church.⁸⁵ What is clear is that Bickerton had a crisis of conscience after abandoning Rigdon. He had to decide where he fit within the religious landscape of America, and instead of converting back to

⁸⁴ Meister, "The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography," p. 5.

⁸⁵ Stone, *William Bickerton*, pp. 40-41, 340.

Methodism, he decided to join Brigham Young, even though he was not the average patriarchal Mormon. This fact would weigh on him even more when Young decided to publicly endorse polygamy. Bickerton was then compelled to forsake Young and re-evaluate his religious thoughts yet again, leading him to establish a new American church that fell in line with his conscience — one that would ordain women and recognise their spiritual independence.

Mormon biography has become a budding genre that helps historians gain intimate perspectives and broader scopes of the past. Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen argued in their book, *Mormon History* (2001):

Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry and lifeless forms, but they had the promise of becoming something more. The name of Ezekiel's valley is not given, but in a symbolic sense the prophet may have glimpsed the valley of Mormon biography. Like other forms of Mormon history, Mormon life-writing (an appropriate modern term for biography and autobiography) has passed through several stages. Until recently, however, it has seldom been well balanced and "alive," full of human realism and descriptive of the "times" through which an individual has passed. As S. George Ellsworth wrote in the introduction to his biography of Samuel Claridge, "The life of one person may be so representative of his times and the movements in which he participated that his biography becomes a history of those times and events." The challenge of biography, then, is to tell of such a life, fully and honestly, and in the process to animate a previous "life" and "age."⁸⁶

A biography of an early Mormon leader, especially a prophet, should reflect the larger movements of Mormonism and American religion.

In order to be considered a prophet of Mormonism, especially during the foundation of the religious movement, a prophet and his followers had to believe that they were re-establishing or perpetuating the true Christian church in preparation for Jesus Christ's imminent return. They had to believe that the prophet was God's true messenger and spokesman for the last days. These prophets not only helped build churches, but delivered new doctrines, clarified and corrected theology, and often influenced thousands of people to dramatically alter their lives for what they believed

⁸⁶ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 113.

was a sacred cause. This included sacrificing livelihoods, families, and other important pursuits. All the while, many of them lived in the United States during a time when the nation was radically transforming religiously, politically, socially, and economically.

These circumstances often raise the question: Why did a prophet decide to speak or act in a particular manner? As previously discussed, some historians do not like biography because questions about a subject's motives can often arise and be speculative in nature. Nevertheless, questions about motive are what continue to help fuel, strengthen, and perpetuate the craft of biography.

Whether some historians like it or not, the thoughts, intentions, and motivations of religious leaders, including Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith III, and William Bickerton, are integral to understanding the movements they led, along with the larger national cultures they interacted with. To believers, they were prophets sent by God to do the Lord's bidding. Therefore, trying to understand their thoughts, intentions, and motivations is at the heart of understanding their religious movements. For instance, with regard to early Christianity, is it even possible to imagine historians, theologians or other academics not trying to understand the motivations of the Apostle Paul? Questions like these fuel the fields of biography, history, and religion. Applying these questions to Mormonism perpetuates Mormon biography and helps explain why several peer-reviewed publishers continue to release books in the genre. Attempting to understand the thoughts and motivations of religious figures while examining their movements produces several contrasting interpretations. Yet these interpretations are necessary and, no doubt, increase interest in the field. Overall, historiographical

controversy is the lifeblood of history, so contrasting interpretations benefit biography as well.⁸⁷

Mormon biography, however, did not get to this point overnight. It evolved over the last two centuries. Since the beginning of the religious movement, the art of biography has suited Mormonism. The first Mormon life-writings followed the Victorian trend in general, focusing on panegyric expression rather than human realism. Nigel Hamilton in *Biography: A Brief History* (2007) wrote, “It was therefore not surprising that the Mormon revelation of 1830 should have taken place in America. In the fluid, relatively classless society of the New World ... such revelations found fertile soil, as did other autobiographical claims and testimony, both religious and secular — forcing Americans to rest their new beliefs and identities in a unique, pioneering way that still characterises American autobiography today.”⁸⁸ For Mormon autobiography and biography, literary skill was still being developed in the nineteenth century, and historical objectivity was rather something to be looked forward to. Regardless, Whittaker, Walker, and Allen made a valid point: “If a modern reader wishes to enter that first world of Mormon thought—and all its hopes, desires, and dreams—nineteenth-century biography is one of the best places to start.”⁸⁹ Works like Lucy Mack Smith’s *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (1853), Edward W. Tullidge’s *Life of Brigham Young* (1876), and B.H.

⁸⁷ Jana Riess, “Religion Update Fall 2013: Mormon Studies Grows Up,” *Publishers Weekly*, October 4, 2013; Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, pp. 115-17.

⁸⁸ Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 101-02.

⁸⁹ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 117.

Roberts's *Life of John Taylor* (1892), reveal the "spirit" of Victorian hagiography and offer important glimpses into the historiography of Mormonism.⁹⁰

It was not until the twentieth century that Mormon biography started to employ more professional methods of writing. By then, it had grown into a conspicuous form of "cultural expression." More than 1,100 publications with biographical motifs were produced between 1900 and 1997: 320 books, 670 articles, and 115 theses and dissertations.⁹¹ The most famous (or infamous) work was Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (1945).⁹² Brodie brought out controversial elements of Smith's past, referenced arguments made by anti-Mormon advocates such as Eber D. Howe and Doctor Philastus Hurlbut, and focused on Smith's natural intelligence, creativity, and skill which made him a complex mortal who evolved over time.⁹³ Her work became a permanent fixture within Mormon historiography and was a prime example of the biographical trend taking shape during this time.

Mormon historians now expect biographies to contain three main ingredients: the science and methodology of history, literary art, and human realism.⁹⁴ In the last twenty-five years, several award-winning biographies about nineteenth-century Mormon leaders have contained these elements, most notably Roger Launius's *Joseph Smith III* (1988), Richard S. Van Wagoner's *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*

⁹⁰ Publication details of the books mentioned above: Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S.W. Richards, 1853); Edward W. Tullidge, *Life of Brigham Young* (New York: 1876); B.H. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1892).

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 121; Laura Marcus, "The Newness of the 'New Biography': Biographical Theory and Practice in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, pp. 193-218.

⁹² Publication details: Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945).

⁹³ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 123.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 115-17.

(1994), Richard Lyman Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005), Vickie Cleverley Speek's *God Has Made Us a Kingdom: James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (2006), John G. Turner's *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (2012), and Ronald E. Romig's *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (2014). These works place their subjects within the times in which they lived, focusing on some of the most prominent Mormon movements of the nineteenth century.

While researching William Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ, I read these books and tried to build upon what they had accomplished. Of course, like all historical works, these books are not immune to criticism, but they offered a formidable roadmap to writing an effective historical biography that employed literary art and objectivity. Most prominently, I tried to build on Richard Bushman's and John Turner's biographies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Like Bushman's work on Smith, I too am a believing historian who attempted to examine a Latter Day Saint prophet within the context of Mormon history and nineteenth-century America. Similar to Smith, Bickerton was a poor man of English descent who found himself transformed into a religious leader. Similarly to Turner's presentation of Young, who tried to show the second Mormon president as a leader who was haunted by Smith's untimely murder, I too tried to look at Bickerton as a man who was keenly aware of the Mormon past that had preceded his religious movement.

Walker, Whittaker, and Allen summarised several challenges and opportunities that Mormon biographers now encounter, ones I had to keep in mind while writing the book and articles on Bickerton. Firstly, they asserted that historians can only access "full truth" by investigating a person's inner being — personality, psychology, physiology,

sexuality, and health — which then leads historians into examining human weaknesses and relationships within political, social, and economic contexts. Several Mormon biographers in the past did not conduct this type of careful investigation, especially if they were closely associated with the LDS Church's leadership.⁹⁵ This certainly was the case for almost all the prior scholarship about Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ. Other than Gary Entz, no other scholar or church member attempted to thoroughly examine the growth of Bickerton's religious movement or its interaction with the LDS Church and other Latter Day Saint groups. Also, no one tried to understand how Bickerton's religious ideas evolved over time. In addition, Bickerton had several limitations. He was poor, had no formal education, became disaffected from two Latter Day Saint churches, struggled to suppress constant squabbles in his own church, and often found himself reacting to (rather than preemptively planning for) unfortunate events. These disadvantages trickled down to his followers, affecting the Church and its ultimate goals.

Having said that, I admit I was only able to examine Bickerton's inner being nominally. As far as it is known, Bickerton left no diaries, journals, or personal letters for posterity, or if he did they are lost. My attempt to access the "full truth" of Bickerton's life was obviously hampered by this lack of documentation. However, I had access to thousands of pages of minutes, writings, publications, and newspaper articles (some even written by Bickerton) that not only gave insight into his thoughts, but allowed for an examination of his personality. Several of his statements to colleagues, excerpts of sermons, along with reflections by friends and enemies gave me an opportunity to include what Walker, Whittaker, and Allen suggested Mormon biography often lacks:

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

“the telling anecdote, the offhand comment, the characteristic trivia that great biographers have seized upon to reveal their subjects.”⁹⁶ I was able to display Bickerton’s disgust for polygamy, his patient nature, along with his occasional outbursts to detractors. My access to these details allowed for the employment of literary flair within a historical framework. I wrote analytical narratives that offered insights into Bickerton’s motives and the development of his religious movement within a rapidly evolving United States. I did what Walker, Whittaker, and Allen suggested all biographers should do: “Biographers must allow their research to suggest a controlling point of view, passion, or insight, which must be arrived at independently of any preconceived idea of ‘what ideally should be.’ Then as the narrative is written, it can be shaped, paced, and perhaps rearranged through flashback.” Also important, a biographer must probe a subject’s inner thoughts “through reverie, the subjunctive mood, or a word montage of the subject’s psychological feelings” to bring the story to life. “Scene, description, density of detail, idiom, and even authentically obtained dialogue may create the illusion of life.”⁹⁷ This model parallels Richard Holmes’s and Paula Backscheider’s philosophy for writing biography.⁹⁸

In spite of these benefits, a writer’s over-use of colourful anecdotes and passion does not make for good history either. Alex Beam in his book, *American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church* (2014),⁹⁹ used this type of portrayal at times. In his *New York Times* review of Beam’s book, Benjamin Moser

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

⁹⁸ Holmes, “The Proper Study?”, pp. 7-18; Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, pp. 18, 80-86.

⁹⁹ Publication details: Alex Beam, *American Crucifixion: The Murder of Joseph Smith and the Fate of the Mormon Church* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

remarked, “the story Beam tells is full of dramatic detail,” but what he missed was the “tragedy” of Smith’s assassination, a theme alluded to by the title. “One understands why people hated him, but not so much why they loved him.” This omission should have been at the heart of Beam’s book, but instead, Joseph Smith was depicted as a “flamboyant frontier L. Ron Hubbard,” rather than a peculiar religious leader whose church survived despite his American crucifixion.¹⁰⁰

By utilising historical and biographical tools carefully, Bickerton can now be seen as a complex individual, pressured from different fronts, drawn to both heaven and earth. As Walker, Whittaker, and Allen stated, “Good biography understands that men and women grow and atrophy and that virtue to have any meaning must be tested.”¹⁰¹ This is what was accomplished with my book and articles, and why I quoted Bushman in the introduction of *William Bickerton*: “Covering up errors makes no sense in any case ... Flawless characters are neither attractive nor useful.”¹⁰² From the start of the book, I wanted the reader to know my perspective on historical biography. I modelled my introduction on Bushman’s preface, and developed some of his explanations on how a believing historian can attempt to objectively examine a revered religious figure.

This, of course, leads into what Walker, Whittaker, and Allen suggested is the greatest challenge for Mormon biographers: “how they should treat their own religious faith — if at all.”¹⁰³ During the past century, every historical publication by the Church of

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Moser, “Patriarch and Pariah,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 116.

¹⁰² Stone, *William Bickerton*, p. x; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, p. x.

¹⁰³ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 139. For another exploration of Mormon scholars writing about their faith, see J. Spencer Fluhman, Kathleen Flake, and Jed Woodworth, eds., *To Be Learned is Good: Essays on Faith and Scholarship in Honor of Richard Lyman Bushman* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2018).

Jesus Christ attempted to portray Bickerton as secondary to the religious movement he started. This manner of writing may suit the purposes of heritage history, but it largely ignores human elements. On the other hand, writing religious history using a secular lens that ignores the deep-seated faith of individuals is not much better either. A healthy balance must be struck, especially for believing scholars.

One may even opine that a believing scholar, if professionally trained, can have an advantage while writing religious history. Historian Henry F. May, who held no official religious affiliation, argued that empathetic or believing historians actually have a better chance at writing assiduous religious history. “To write excellent religious history ... one must have something like religious sensibility or imagination,” he insisted. “Obviously, one does not have to be a believer. It is possible to write well about something one totally disbelieves, fears, or hates. But it is really not possible to write excellent history about something one dismisses, however tacitly, as unimportant.”¹⁰⁴ Jay D. Green agreed with May’s assertion, stating that a “sense of empathy for religion—and the scholarship it produced—would come to constitute an important expression of faith-informed historiography.”¹⁰⁵ There are several distinguished Mormon scholars who share this empathy, notably Richard Lyman Bushman, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Stanley B. Kimball, and Patrick Q. Mason, as well as Protestant scholars, such as George M. Marsden, Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and Thomas S. Kidd. Rather than serving as a sign of inferiority, an empathetic approach to religious history has actually reinforced

¹⁰⁴ Henry F. May, “Religion and American Intellectual History, 1945–1985: Reflections on an Uneasy Relationship,” in *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Jay D. Green, *Christian Historiography: Five Rival Versions* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), pp. 7-8.

these historians' adept awareness of their subjects, and their colleagues have recognised this.

Biography, if done properly, can respectfully present human elements while critically examining a subject within broader historical settings. From the perspective of a churchgoing non-academic, a believing scholar's attempt to examine the human side of church history can seem sacrilegious. However, this does not have to be the case. Bushman once remarked that historians are needed "who will mourn the failings of the Saints out of honor for God instead of relishing the warts because they show the church was earthbound after all."¹⁰⁶ This approach, although noble, can also be a hagiographic minefield. I attempted to chart a more balanced course. Taking a suggestion from Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, I tried to "give the transcendent its proper due" while "providing historical context for such phenomena," allowing Bickerton and his peers "to speak for themselves." This middle road leaves judgment with those of "spiritual eyes to see, with readers, not authors, mourning God's cause."¹⁰⁷ The introduction of *William Bickerton* states:

Some historians encounter a dilemma in writing about religion and deciding whether, even in their word choices, to credit a prophet's revelations to God. It is an easier task in a biography, to the extent that a biography should more or less reflect the views of the subject. Even so, I do point out contradictions whenever Bickerton's behavior seems self-interested, reminding readers of what the church members themselves were well aware of, that no one is infallible. The members believed in revelation and received revelations themselves, so they understood the play that existed between speaking in tongues and interpreting the message, and if others felt inspired they stood or shouted their acclamation or spoke in tongues themselves. At other times they rejected a revelation. To a certain extent, one feels the same liberty today, especially with the benefit of hindsight, while simultaneously feeling impressed on many levels.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, "Faithful History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 4 (1969), p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ Stone, *William Bickerton*, p. xi.

Although this inconspicuous form of writing can potentially offend some churchgoers, historians and biographers are trusted with “a more discrete task, freer from conceit and hubris, of describing earthly events as caring mortals fully aware of their own fallibility.”¹⁰⁹ In support of this approach, the University of Oxford’s Prophecy Project (2003-2010) called on scholars to conduct emic investigations of prophets in English religious history, particularly Richard Brothers, Joanna Southcott, and William Blake.¹¹⁰ This project demonstrated that it is the responsibility of the historian and biographer to examine and interpret the past, not push an agenda.

Similar to Oxford’s Prophecy Project, the largest contribution my scholarship offers within the realm of biography is that it examines the evolution of Bickerton’s religious ideas. This is paramount to understanding the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ. Bickerton led the religious movement, was considered God’s prophet, and wielded exceptional influence over his followers. By examining the development of Bickerton’s ecclesiology and theology over time, the progression of his religious movement came more into focus. However, this could potentially raise troubling questions, especially since Bickerton did not always explicitly reveal his thoughts. Therefore, I sometimes had to piece together moving parts to make sense of his life and church. This is similar to other biographers. Backscheider even remarked, “The biographer is explorer, inquirer, hypothesizer, compiler, researcher, selector, and writer;

¹⁰⁹ Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, p. 140.

¹¹⁰ Books produced from the University of Oxford’s Prophecy Project: Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries Who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Jane Shaw and Philip Lockley, eds., *The History of a Modern Millennial Movement: The Southcottians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Matthew Niblett, *Prophecy and the Politics of Salvation in Late Georgian England: The Theology and Apocalyptic Vision of Joanna Southcott* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Susanne Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Deborah Madden, *The Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers’s Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

none of these is a neutral act.”¹¹¹ Adept biographers understand that they are fashioning a reality through their choices of documents and how they arrange them, and they realise that they are highlighting and interpreting aspects of a person’s life they never personally met. Again, this type of approach may trouble some historians, but it is necessary and shares parallels with traditional historical writing. After years of analysis, biographers do begin to know their subjects. “Good, meticulous, intelligent biographers do know their subjects well enough to explain motives reliably,” Backscheider argued. “But the explanation is always to some extent coloured, perhaps even partly determined, by what the biographers’ experience and culture have taught them about human motivation.” Once again, this is not unlike other forms of historical writing. This is why it is the biographer’s job “through graphic scenes, the telling quotation, the revealing detail, through character development and the depiction of interpersonal relationships, the power of suggestion, and dramatic narrative sweep, [to] bring someone else’s life into focus.”¹¹²

One of the most significant glimpses into Bickerton’s mind came at his death. There are two reasons why it was vital to begin the biography at this sombre moment. Bickerton’s death dramatically set the stage for the book, and it also helped reveal why the relevant historiography lacks important information about him. Bickerton suffered from an adultery allegation that divided his church for twenty-two years. Although most of the evidence pointed to his innocence, Bickerton failed to vindicate his reputation. Any hope for redress had been muffled by his rivals. Bickerton therefore, chose to speak from the grave. He felt a premonition that his side of the story would not be told,

¹¹¹ Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, p. 119.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 99.

so he asked Allen Wright to read the nineteenth chapter of Job at his funeral.¹¹³ The ancient prophet expressed Bickerton's frustration perfectly: "My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me."¹¹⁴ Bickerton's death not only spoke volumes about his life, but it foretold how future church members and scholars would ignore him after his passing. He would be forgotten or overlooked for over a century. Church politics, along with efforts to preserve heritage history, did not allow for Bickerton's story to be told.

Conclusion

Firmer groundwork has now been laid for scholars to study the Bickertonites. Researchers can now gain deeper insights into the evolution of the Church's structure and theology over time, and can more easily compare the Church to other religious denominations. There are numerous approaches that can be taken to examine Bickerton and his church,¹¹⁵ but a few come to mind that would be worthwhile. More should be written about the Church of Jesus Christ's eschatological beliefs. During the twentieth century, the Church made it a doctrine of faith that the eras of Zion and the Millennium were separate events, a theory Bickerton did not support, yet an idea that originated from his rival, William Cadman Sr. Bickerton should also be compared to other Latter Day Saint leaders, especially ones who were contemporaries, like James

¹¹³ "A Pioneer Gone," *St. John Weekly News*, February 24, 1905.

¹¹⁴ Job 19:14.

¹¹⁵ An obvious path is that Bickerton and his religious movement can be examined more frequently within Mormon studies, especially by utilising the new approaches that are currently being promoted in the field. For ideas, see Patrick Q. Mason, ed., *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016) and Quincy D. Newell and Eric F. Mason, eds., *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

Jesse Strang, Joseph Smith III, Granville Hedrick, and Alpheus Cutler. Interestingly, they all held the same fundamental belief that God had called them as prophets to carry the Church forward after Joseph Smith's death, yet the ways in which they fulfilled this mission were at times drastically different. Bickerton could be contextualised more within the Christian Restoration movement, and he should be compared to other nineteenth-century prophets. Many prophets of the nineteenth century were actually Christian Restorationists, believing that they had been called to prepare their followers for the Millennium through prophetic means, which often meant retreating back to a biblical primordial past.

Although my scholarship has opened a new door within Mormon studies and American religion, it has only scratched the surface of what could be discussed about the Bickertonites. Scholars in religious studies, theology, ethnography, and other fields could benefit from studying Bickerton and his church as well. The emic approach utilised by my scholarship has provided a better understanding of Bickerton and the early Church of Jesus Christ, but more scholarship needs to be produced. I also recognise that my approach is not the only way to examine the Bickertonites. My scholarship is merely one of the first thorough attempts to do so, and I look forward to seeing how it will be used, critiqued, and challenged in the future.

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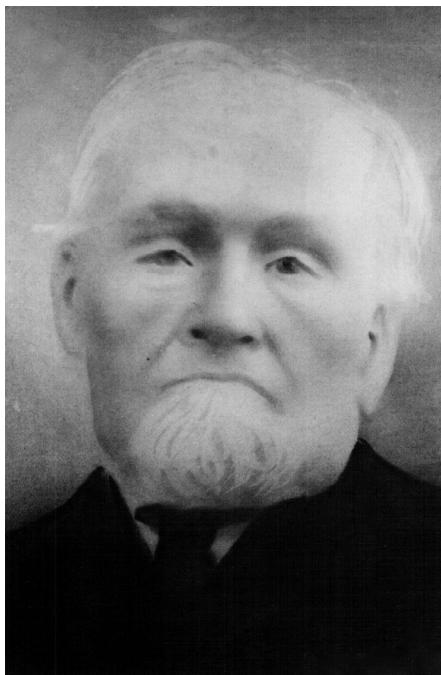
THE ROCKY ROAD TO PROPHETHOOD: WILLIAM BICKERTON'S EMERGENCE AS AN AMERICAN PROPHET

Daniel P. Stone

IN HIS YOUTH, WILLIAM BICKERTON probably never imagined that he would become an American prophet. Yet in the nineteenth century, as other prophets roamed the United States, Bickerton found his spiritual calling. Now, over one hundred years after his death, he has become the founding prophet of the third-largest Latter Day Saint church in the world (members are often referred to as “Bickertonites”), following the Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 2015, Bickerton’s church had over twenty-two thousand members in twenty-three countries with approximately three thousand members in the United States and Canada. Its World

DANIEL P. STONE has an MA and BA in history and has taught at Florida Atlantic University and the University of Detroit Mercy. He has written the first full-length biography on William Bickerton, which is forthcoming from Signature Books. He is also a deacon in The Church of Jesus Christ. Currently, he works in a private archive in the Metro Detroit area.

*William Bickerton, circa 1900
(1815–1905), founder of The
Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonite).
Courtesy of The Church of Jesus
Christ Historical Archive.*



Operations Center and print house are in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.¹ Yet Bickerton's life remains largely in the shadows. His experiences tell much about the Latter Day Saint past. By 1852, he audaciously forsook two Mormon leaders, Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young, and embarked on a mission to establish a new American church. During his prophetic journey, he strove to defy Brigham Young and endeavored to separate the Book of Mormon from Mormonism—a herculean task. Instead of weakening his faith, Bickerton's dissatisfaction with Rigdon and Young actually propelled him to reevaluate the Restored Gospel and prepare the world for Zion.

Born on January 15, 1815, in Kylvoe, Ancroft Parish, Northumberland, England, Bickerton was the seventh of eleven children raised by

¹Resource Information Planning System of The Church of Jesus Christ (accessed December 31, 2015); Paul Palmieri, "150 Year Anniversary of The Church of Jesus Christ," *Gospel News* 68, no. 10 (October 2012): 3. For more information about The Church of Jesus Christ, visit www.thechurchofjesuschrist.org.

Thomas and Isabella Hope Bickerton.² For a time, Bickerton's father was a sheep farmer among the Cheviot Hills in Northumberland. In 1828, Thomas died, leaving Isabella with the hardship of caring for her younger children, six of whom, including Bickerton, were under the age of fifteen.³

A few years later, at the age of sixteen, Bickerton sailed across the Atlantic. On June 20, 1831, he landed in New York City, encountering a nation that was in the midst of radical political, social, and technological transformation.⁴ By all standards, Bickerton was supposed to be a typical, poor English emigrant. All that changed when he moved to western Pennsylvania. His journey as an American prophet began when he joined Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ in June 1845. While settling in West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, a borough near Pittsburgh, he encountered galvanizing news reports about the Mormons, a religious sect that strained the pliant confines of the U.S. First Amendment. As a commercial hub west of the Allegheny Mountains, Pittsburgh provided residents with local and national news. Among the editorials were numerous stories reporting the murder of the prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., and the ensuing power struggle between the Church's leaders. Journalists commented on the idiosyncrasies of Mormonism and the alleged consequences of religious fanaticism. When Sidney Rigdon, the last surviving member of Joseph Smith's Church Presidency, relocated to Pittsburgh in September 1844 and established another church, known as the Church of Christ, reporters tried to discern his intentions, drawing curious locals into the drama.

²Thomas and Isabella Hope Bickerton had eleven children: James, born April 7, 1804; John, born February 11, 1806; Eleanor, born November 22, 1807; Ann, born January 15, 1810; Mary, born January 28, 1812; Thomas, born April 14, 1814; William, born January 15, 1815; Isabelle, born March 15, 1817; Arthur, born July 1820; Alexander, born November 17, 1823; and Robert, born December 28, 1824; see Joyce (Bickerton) Pilgrim, "Descendants of Thomas Bickerton," 1, typescript, The Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive, Greensburg, Penn. (hereafter cited as Historical Archive).

³Pilgrim, "Descendants of Thomas Bickerton," 1–6; John W. Jordan, ed., *Genealogical and Personal History of Western Pennsylvania* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915), 2:1028.

⁴*Registers of Vessels Arriving at the Port of New York from Foreign Ports, 1789–1919*, microfilm, M237, roll 14, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

When Bickerton heard Rigdon preach in Limetown, Pennsylvania, in 1845, he wanted a better life. As a thirty-year-old English emigrant with no formal education, his employment opportunities were limited. His first job in West Elizabeth was as a coal foreman working in the rich carbon deposits along the Monongahela River. He labored in one of the most burdensome and expanding markets of the burgeoning locomotive-driven economy, and he earned bereft wages. With his wife, Dorothy, and infant son, James, his family survived on a limited income.⁵ In 1845, he had not yet received American citizenship, and while living in Jacksonian America, he also encountered anti-British sentiments, a common characteristic of the age. His family's love and perhaps the support he received from a local Methodist church buttressed his otherwise cumbersome existence.⁶

Bickerton read the local reports about Rigdon and Mormonism. The accounts presented exhilarating stories of miracles and revelations. These reports, combined with the unfavorable circumstances of his life, most likely compelled him to hear Rigdon preach. His first encounter with Rigdon forever changed his life. Recalling the event years later, Bickerton remarked, "Sidney Rigdon was the best orator I have ever heard in classing the scriptures together." After hearing only one of his sermons, Bickerton professed that Rigdon "had the power of God."⁷ As a result:

I was convinced of the doctrine of Christ, viz, Faith, Repentance and Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and its effects is according to St. Paul's writing. There is but one Holy Spirit, and whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, we have been all made to drink of the same spirit, and Jesus says, "signs shall follow them that believe, in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues,

⁵William Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 1, Historical Archive; United States Census, West Elizabeth, Allegheny County, Penn., September 19, 1850.

⁶Bickerton filed for American citizenship in 1848; see William Bickerton Naturalization Records, United States Western Judicial District of Pennsylvania, August 5, 1848; Ishmael Humphrey, "Biography of William Bickerton and His Brothers in the Organization of 1862, Greenoak, PA," Historical Archive.

⁷"A Letter," *St. John Sun*, August 4, 1887; Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 1.

they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." And I was never taught such a Gospel.⁸

Sidney Rigdon's church offered Bickerton an apostolic Christianity that bestowed spiritual gifts to its followers. For an emigrant who received limited rights and privileges in the United States, the Lord's promises satisfied his unmet needs.

In June, Bickerton received baptism from John Frazier, one of Rigdon's High Councilors.⁹ Later he recalled, "I received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands, and the signs have followed me. I have spoken in new tongues, have had the interpretation, I have seen the sick healed and I have been healed myself, so that I [k] now that the Gospel is the power of God." Just months later he "was called by the Holy Spirit to be an Elder." He felt "the power of God came down and sealed the office upon me."¹⁰ A short time later he received two more callings as an evangelist and prophet, priest, and king.

The calling of prophet, priest, and king originated from Joseph Smith and his Council of Fifty. Influenced by his millennial aspirations and the Mormon Church's explorations into America's western territories, Smith hoped to prepare a political government that would oversee the forthcoming kingdom of God. In the *Times and Seasons*, Rigdon explained the Council of Fifty: "When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up a system of government; when I speak of a government I mean what I say; I mean a government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs."¹¹ Rigdon ordained prophets, priests, and kings to fulfill what the Apostle John had prophesied in the book of Revelation. During the first resurrection in the Millennium,

⁸William Bickerton et al., *The Ensign: Or a Light to Lighten the Gentiles, in which the Doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, is Set Forth, and Scripture Evidence Adduced to Establish it. Also, a Brief Treatise upon the Most Important Prophecies Recorded in the Old and New Testaments, Which Relate to the Great Work of God of the Latter Days* (Pittsburgh: Ferguson & Co., 1863), 5, typescript, Historical Archive (hereafter *The Ensign*).

⁹Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5; "A Letter," *St. John Sun*, August 4, 1887.

¹⁰Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5; Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 1.

¹¹Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 519; *Times and Seasons* (May 1, 1844): 524, cited in Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 521.

Christ's disciples would become "kings and priests" and reign with the Savior a thousand years. Bickerton's new calling as a prophet, priest, and king granted him the same basic prophetic gift that Sidney Rigdon claimed to hold.¹²

With other members of the priesthood, Bickerton studied in Rigdon's School of the Prophets. A March editorial in the *Messenger and Advocate* explained the school ensured that its members would "be perfected in their ministry for the salvation of Zion, and of the nations of Israel, and of the Gentiles, as many as will believe." Bickerton, who until this point had no formal education, learned with men of different trades, crafts, and skills. Together they discussed the scriptures, studied subjects of the liberal arts, and discovered the workings of the Holy Spirit to perpetuate the kingdom of God.¹³

Two months after Bickerton's conversion, Rigdon began preparations for building the New Jerusalem in Pennsylvania. He and Apostle William McLellin traveled on horseback to Antrim Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania. While riding along the Conococheague Creek of the Cumberland Valley, they stopped on a stone bridge over the water. They surveyed a 390-acre farm owned by Andrew G. McLanahan, known locally as "Adventure Farm." Rigdon professed to McLellin, "This is the place the Lord has shown us in visions to be the site of the city of the New Jerusalem." When they returned to Pittsburgh, Rigdon was determined to purchase the farm.¹⁴

When Bickerton joined the Church of Christ, he knew that Rigdon wanted to prepare for the Savior's return. However, he never anticipated Rigdon's hasty plans to usher in Zion. While attending the School of the Prophets, Bickerton, along with other members of the priesthood, claimed that "many things were revealed to us, showing things were going wrong. No one followed Sidney Rigdon

¹²Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6.

¹³Doctrine and Covenants 90:8, cited in "For the Messenger and Advocate," *Messenger and Advocate*, March 1, 1845.

¹⁴Samuel P. Bates, *History of Franklin County, Pennsylvania: Containing a History of the County, Its Townships, Towns, Villages, Schools, Churches, Industries, Etc.; Portraits of Early Settlers and Prominent Men; Biographies; History of Pennsylvania, Statistical and Miscellaneous Matter, Etc., Etc.* (Chicago: Warner Beers & Co., 1887), 563; B. M. Nead, "The History of Mormonism with Particular Reference to the Founding of the New Jerusalem in Franklin County," in *Kittchoctinny Historical Society Papers* (Chambersburg, Penn.: Franklin Repository Press, 1923), 9:424.

from that Branch, because we knew by the spirit that he was going wrong. He sent two of his apostles to stop our assembly of the school of the prophets . . . and many things were revealed that came to pass.”¹⁵ The school’s members foresaw the failure of Rigdon’s New Jerusalem on Adventure Farm. As time elapsed, they would find that their predictions would come true, but their prophecies were not the only indication of Rigdon’s downfall. Reminiscing about his father over half a century later, John Wickliffe Rigdon remembered that some of his father’s followers believed “he was so extreme in his ideas that they left him. He was at times so perfectly wild that he could not control himself.”¹⁶

In addition, Bickerton thought Rigdon moved too quickly to establish Zion. In the School of the Prophets, Bickerton studied Joseph Smith’s prophecies including a foretelling of the American Civil War in 1832. Smith prophesied that South Carolina would secede and swallow the United States into an internal conflict.¹⁷ Rigdon wrote in the February 15, 1845, issue of the *Messenger and Advocate*: “This nation will, at a period now future, divide into parties, and these parties will go to war one with the other, and increase in violence until the government will loose [*sic*] its power, and the country be a scene of confusion and bloodshed. Party against party, and district against district, until all peace and good order will depart to return no more until the God of heaven shall take the power into his own hands.” He added, “This republic has a nation laying on her western border, with whom no very good feelings exist, and that nation only wants an opportunity to avenge themselves of injuries they claim to have sustained. In addition, there is yet another nation of colored people in the south, who would gladly deliver themselves from their present condition.”¹⁸ Bickerton may have believed that since South

¹⁵Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 1.

¹⁶Karl Keller, ed., “‘I Never Knew a Time When I Did Not Know Joseph Smith’: A Son’s Record of the Life and Testimony of Sidney Rigdon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 4 (1966): 40.

¹⁷To read Joseph Smith’s prophecy about the American Civil War, see Doctrine and Covenants 87:1–8; see also Joseph Smith Jr., “A Prophecy by Joseph Smith: Revelation and Prophecy Given by Joseph Smith on December 25, 1832 Was Recorded in Our Record in October of 1874,” (Monongahela: Penn.: The Church of Jesus Christ, n.d.), 1.

¹⁸Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 1; “The Purposes of God,” *Messenger and Advocate*, February 15, 1845.

Carolina had not yet seceded from the union it was not time for the Millennium.

Rigdon loathed the objectors to his Zion plans. To wreak his vengeance, he waxed prophetic at the 1846 April Conference, the last general meeting of the Church of Christ held in Pittsburgh. Bickerton, as a newly appointed member of Rigdon's Grand Council, attended the meeting.¹⁹ Bickerton, no doubt, listened closely to Rigdon's visions pertaining to all malcontents:

While sitting in his [Rigdon's] own house, reflecting upon the peculiar circumstances with which he was surrounded, suddenly the vision opened to his view.—Thousands stood before him, and the Lord told him, that they were the honorable men of the city, and through them the means should come for the redemption of Zion. It passed, and another scene opened to his view—He beheld a company of the old Mormon church of this city, among whom he recognised the faces of several, with whom he had formed a slight acquaintance, the Lord had shown him that many of these men were not the materials with whom Zion shall be built.

Rigdon further proclaimed:

There seemed to have been a struggle between the Lord and satan, between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. The devil had sought to overthrow this kingdom—some of those whom we once loved as brethren had left us, or fallen by transgression, and by circulating the most base and malicious slanders against us, had shown the corruption of their own hearts. In the midst of this conflict, interposition of providence had placed it beyond their reach to do us harm. There could be no doubt now in what relation we stand to the heavens, and by whose wisdom power we are guided—no man in this kingdom could rise up and say he had had no evidence for in the gloomiest hour of our history, when human wisdom was of no avail, the great God had clearly shown us that he was our guardian and protector. I feel as if we stand on “terra firma.”²⁰

¹⁹Interestingly enough, back in December 1845, Bickerton had actually replaced Apostle William McLellin on the Grand Council, when McLellin abandoned Rigdon's church. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831–1836* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), 337–38.

²⁰“Minutes of a Conference of the Church and Kingdom of Christ, Held in Pittsburgh, Commencing on the 6th and Ending on the 8th of April, 1846,” *Messenger and Advocate*, June 1846.

Rigdon believed members of the Church of Christ who questioned his plans, along with Brigham Young's supporters, futilely attempted to impede God's will. He portrayed the dissenters as Satan's disciples. The malcontents within the School of the Prophets could not stop him from ushering in Zion. To support Rigdon's endeavor, H. G. Whitlock presented a revelation to the conference, commanding the congregation to contribute to the Financial Committee "all that can be spared, from the widow's mite to him that has thousands" for "the redemption of Zion, and for a perpetual home for my saints." After Whitlock finished reading the revelation, the Grand Council was asked to verify whether it was from the Lord. The council unanimously voted affirmatively. Ridgon then declared, "He was treading upon ground unexplored by man, for he had no predecessor . . . His enemies had been aiming a death blow at the kingdom, but the Lord had stretched forth his hand in its deliverance from their reach, and covered its opposers with eternal shame."²¹

Even though Bickerton claimed to have received revelations that Rigdon was going astray, he hesitated to openly oppose his church's president. Rigdon had spoken strong words, promising that those who stood in his way would receive damnation. At the conference, Bickerton said that "he had lately become a member of the church and kingdom of Christ. He knew what it meant by being baptised [*sic*] with the Holy Ghost, and felt the weight of the responsibilities resting upon him." But as a member of the School of the Prophets, Bickerton knew that revelations were being received that claimed Rigdon was going astray. Bickerton's recent appointment to the Grand Council could not smother his conscience. He soon became more determined that his revelations about the downfall of Rigdon's New Jerusalem were true. He eventually supported the dissenters in the School of the Prophets. Although Rigdon sent two of his apostles to permanently dismiss the school, they could not break the resolve of these tenacious objectors.²²

With his limited congregation and capital, Sidney Rigdon vastly overestimated his church's capabilities. On Adventure Farm, his followers could only afford to equip a barn as a meeting house. Only seven months after his arrival to the Cumberland Valley, Rigdon's prophecies turned on his own head. In January 1847, Peter Boyer,

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.; Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 1.

chair of the church's Financial Committee, paid a judgment of \$2,980. The farm was months away from transferring back to its previous owner. Rigdon and his converts feared losing their Zion; their dreams and wealth were completely invested in its glorious onset. Therefore, one evening in a last fateful attempt to move the hand of God, the Rigdonites clothed themselves in "ascension robes," knelt in a meadow behind their temple barn, and throughout the night fervently prayed for the Savior's return. To their dismay, Jesus never came. Shivering from the cold, the following morning they wallowed back to their homes in despair. Members of the Church of Christ lost approximately \$6,000 in their futile attempt to build the New Jerusalem. Adventure Farm, the Zion that never flourished, returned back to its previous owner in August during a sheriff's auction, while Rigdon fled to Friendship, New York.²³

The remaining Rigdonites had to find a way to eke out an existence. Many migrated back to Pittsburgh where they found charity from the dissenters who had refused to travel to the Cumberland Valley. Bickerton, who was one of those dissenters, remembered this trying time: "After Rigdon went wrong all that followed him fell away, and I was left alone, seeking to know what course to pursue. My house was a resting place for many of those who had followed Sidney Rigdon."²⁴ It is difficult to comprehend how these shattered converts felt. Bickerton, who had moved to the outskirts of Pittsburgh as a poor, uneducated English emigrant, eventually became a prophet, priest, and king under the Mormon spokesman. Rigdon promised Bickerton a crown in the Millennium, and the Book of Mormon introduced an apostolic Christianity that he had never known. Then in 1846, he became disenchanted with Rigdon. Now he found himself alone and without a church, consoling those who had lost their finances in the pursuit of Zion.

Bickerton's feelings may have correlated with John Wickliffe Rigdon's views: "I do not think the Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] made any mistake in placing the leadership on Brigham Young . . . Sidney Rigdon had no executive ability, was broken down

²³Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 391–93; Nead, "The History of Mormonism," 423; Rigdon, Letter to Stephen Post, January 23, 1856, Post Collection, cited in Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 392.

²⁴Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 1.

with sickness, and could not have taken charge of the Church at that time . . . I have no fault to find with the Church with doing what they did. It was the best thing they could have done under the circumstances.”²⁵ Bickerton had witnessed first hand the liability of Rigdon’s erratic behavior and felt obliged to aid those who lost their finances in the Cumberland Valley. After the downfall of Rigdon’s New Jerusalem, Bickerton’s writings were almost silent from late 1847 to mid-1851. During that time, he maintained his convictions in the Restored Gospel, but he needed ecclesiastical stability to foster his congregation.

At that point Brigham Young appeared as a viable partner to champion God’s latter-day work. But Bickerton faced some serious questions. Were Rigdon’s claims against Young actually a ploy to garner support for his pride? Were his allegations really a hoax? Bickerton probably wondered if Young had spared his followers from Rigdon’s volatile conduct. After all, contrary to Rigdon’s scandalous reports, Young and other church leaders publicly contended they did not practice polygamy. As the year 1850 approached, Bickerton’s prejudice toward the Twelve started to assuage. Rigdon appeared the traitor while Young emerged as a practical ally to prepare for the Millennium.

When Bickerton started his investigation, Young was Utah’s territorial governor. Thousands of beleaguered Saints had settled in Salt Lake City and the outlying region. The city had become a flourishing commercial center where westward travelers, gold seekers, and religious pioneers congregated. Religiously, politically, and economically, Young’s Latter-day Saints prospered. Young had succeeded where Sidney Rigdon had failed. Bickerton stood at a crossroad and did not know which way to venture. When he learned about Young’s success in the Great Basin, his suspicions, like those of so many other Americans, began to subside.

Sometime in 1850, Bickerton sent an inquiry to Kanesville, Iowa, requesting information about the LDS Church. John Murray and David James Ross, two itinerant Mormon elders, eventually received Bickerton’s request. In 1851, the pair traveled to meet his small congregation of nine members in West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania. They held a meeting with Bickerton’s group where both parties shared their

²⁵Keller, “I Never Knew a Time,” 40.

beliefs, concerns, and questions.²⁶ Both parties shared important similarities. Ross and Murray sustained that the Mormons did not practice polygamy. The duo lied to Bickerton, but their confirmation refuted Rigdon's accusation that Smith had fallen into apostasy by introducing the practice. This admission pleased Bickerton. Therefore, he and the Mormon missionaries supported the notion that Smith had maintained his prophetic office before his death.²⁷ And paramount to both group's convictions, Bickerton and the Latter-day Saints believed that Jesus Christ's Second Coming was imminent. According to a sermon that Joseph Smith had delivered in 1835, Christ would return sometime in 1891.²⁸

Despite all the resemblances, there were some differences between the groups. Bickerton may not have agreed with the Mormon philosophy that God had called Joseph Smith as the Choice Seer. According to the Book of Mormon, a man named Joseph (who would be a descendant of the biblical Joseph of Egypt) would receive an appointment from God in the latter days as the Choice Seer and would gather into America the scattered twelve tribes of Israel.²⁹ Early Mormons had considered Smith this leader. However, Mormons had believed the gathering could not happen all at once. First, Smith had to convert the Gentiles. Then he had to convert the American Indians (who were also descendants of the biblical Joseph of Egypt). Next, God's spirit would incline the Jews (the descendants of the biblical Judah) who resided in the Eastern Hemisphere to return to the city of Jerusalem. According to Smith, this event would fulfill God's covenant in

²⁶"News from the Elders," *Frontier Guardian*, July 25, 1851; "News from the Traveling Elders," *Frontier Guardian*, August 22, 1851; Victor Emanuel Bean and William W. Allen, Letter to William Moroni Palmer, December 14, 1885, typescript by John E. Mancini, Lamb Foundation Archive, Albuquerque, N.M.

²⁷Victor Emanuel Bean and William W. Allen, Letter to William Moroni Palmer, December 14, 1885, typescript by John E. Mancini, Lamb Foundation Archive, Albuquerque, N.M.; William Bickerton, *St. John Weekly News*, August 16, 1889; William H. Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela, Penn.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1945), 1:5–6; Gary R. Entz, "Zion Valley: The Mormon Origins of St. John, Kansas," *Kansas History* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 101.

²⁸Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Desert News, 1902), 2:182.

²⁹Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 3:6–24.

the Bible of restoring the city of Jerusalem to Judah's descendants. Then Smith had planned to build the New Jerusalem in America and send missionaries into the world one last time to gather in the righteous. During this period, the Civil War would begin, which would ultimately spread to all the nations of the world. During the chaos, all the ungodly would perish. Smith's role as the Choice Seer was supposed to introduce Jesus Christ's millennial reign.³⁰

But Smith did not fulfill this prophecy. Rigdon, who considered himself the new Choice Seer, had planned to complete the task, but he too did not accomplish it. As a result, after Smith's death, the Latter-day Saints believed that they were gathering Israel by baptizing new members. Ordained patriarchs bestowed on converts a blessing, wherein they assigned the novices to a tribe of Israel. The blessing designated whether converts contained the actual blood of Israel or whether they were adopted into Israel.³¹ However, Bickerton probably did not think the Church had the authority to assign a person to an Israelite tribe. He eventually considered the practice irrelevant. As long as one repented, received baptism within the church, and accepted the divinity of Christ, he or she could take part in the establishment of Zion. This is when Bickerton probably started to develop a new concept about the Choice Seer. He thought the leader had not yet arrived. He concluded the man would be an American Indian.

Bickerton came to this conclusion about the Choice Seer after reading the Book of Mormon. Lehi had told his family, "Yea, Joseph [of Egypt] truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins."³² Lehi was a descendant of the biblical Joseph who was sold into slavery and brought into Egypt. Therefore, according to the prophecy, Bickerton understood that the Choice Seer had to be a descendant of Lehi, or otherwise an American Indian. Bickerton also knew that in the preface of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni foretold that the book would "come forth in due time by the way of Gentile." For Jews, the term "Gentile" had always signified anyone who was not of Jewish ancestry. Joseph Smith was many things, but for Bickerton, he could not have

³⁰Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 122–23, 165, 415–16; Le Grand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1967), 207–42.

³¹John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2012), 48.

³²Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 3:6.

been a Gentile and a descendant of Joseph of Egypt at the same time. It is likely that this contradiction alone had led him to believe that Smith could not have been the Choice Seer. In addition, Lehi had indicated that the Choice Seer would be a deliverer, like Moses, to the House of Israel, and Smith, in the eyes of Bickerton, was not. Overall, Bickerton concluded that Smith had not fulfilled any of these Book of Mormon prophecies.³³

Around the time of the Civil War, Bickerton believed Joseph, this American Indian Moses, would arise from obscurity and liberate his people. When this occurred, the Indians would vex the Gentiles and repossess the American continent. Eventually the Civil War would envelop the whole world and destroy all of the unrighteous. Then the Indians, with the righteous Gentiles, would start to build the New Jerusalem and gather the other Israelite tribes into the Americas. This final act would fulfill the symbolic covenant that God had given the House of Israel in the Book of Mormon. As the biblical Joseph had gathered his family into the foreign land of Egypt, so too would the Choice Seer gather the descendants of Israel into the foreign land of America. During this same period, Judah's lineage, residing in the Eastern Hemisphere, would reoccupy the original city of Jerusalem, fulfilling God's covenant to them in the Bible. Then, at last, the world would await Jesus Christ's return. Few in Mormon history had ever imagined such a concept. Bickerton's opinion that the Choice Seer would spring from the American Indians demonstrated that he saw flaws in Smith's and Rigdon's millennial theories.³⁴

Nevertheless, after discussing their variances, Ross and Murray decided that Bickerton and his congregation could become part of the Mormon Church. They assured him their differences were reconcilable. Although Bickerton had peculiar opinions about the Millennium, he still accepted that God had called Joseph Smith and Brigham Young as prophets. It did not matter that Bickerton held other ideas about Zion, possibly since future events had not yet transpired. Ross and Murray primarily needed Bickerton to accept the axiom that the priesthood authority had transferred from Joseph Smith to

³³Book of Mormon, preface.

³⁴For more information regarding Bickerton's beliefs about the apocalypse, Zion, and Jesus Christ's Second Coming, see Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 11–12, 15–17. William Bickerton declared that the Choice Seer would be a descendant of the American Indians in Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 17.

Brigham Young. When he affirmed that concept, they welcomed his admission into the Church.³⁵

Sometime in late 1851 or early 1852, Brigham Young decided to publicly endorse plural marriage. He had already told the Utah Saints in early 1851 that he was practicing polygamy, but now he wanted to alter the Church's policy and make the doctrine official. He planned to acknowledge, as well as defend, the tenet. By this period, accounts of plural marriage had reached a wide audience. In 1851, a Mormon named Frederick Cox received an order from the Iowa courts in Kanesville to abandon his two youngest wives. In early 1852, an exposé written by an ex-Mormon appeared in the *Lehigh Register* of eastern Pennsylvania that manifested the "licentiousness run mad" in Utah. Although Young withheld his official announcement of plural marriage until a special conference in August 1852, traveling Mormon officials publicized the doctrine earlier in the year.³⁶

While attending a Church meeting in Allegheny City, Bickerton heard the shocking news. To prepare the Saints in the east for Brigham Young's August announcement, Church officials informed the assembly that if they promptly accepted the doctrine of plural marriage, they would receive God's approval. On the other hand, if they denounced the practice, they would accept damnation. The news disconcerted Bickerton's feelings and his anger ensued. After hearing the announcement, Bickerton arose from his seat and stood among the congregation, many of whom knew him personally. Then he declared, "If the approval of God were to come to [me] by accepting the doctrine of polygamy, [I would] prefer the displeasure of God." He walked out of the meeting, displaying his defiance to the entire assembly. At that moment he abandoned the Mormon Church. The man who had helped triple his Mormon congregation the prior year vowed to never return.³⁷

Young's polygamy announcement also led Bickerton to question some of the Church's theology. Bickerton did not give a clear

³⁵Entz, "Zion Valley," 101; Victor Emanuel Bean and William W. Allen, Letter to William Moroni Palmer, December 14, 1885.

³⁶Turner, *Brigham Young*, 204; Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 125; "Mormonism Exposed, by a Mormon," *Lehigh Register*, March 25, 1852.

³⁷Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 6; David Jordan, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela, Penn.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002), 2:36.

explanation of how he reevaluated Mormon theology, but by correlating his conclusions with the Bible and the Book of Mormon, it is possible to see how he came to his new understanding. Once he heard that the Twelve supported plural marriage, he felt he had to disregard the precept of eternal exaltation because it was inseparably linked to polygamy. According to his understanding, the Book of Mormon clearly forbade plural marriage. Mormons, he thought, ironically called themselves after a book that prohibited the doctrine. In his mind, this alone proved the Church's hypocrisy.³⁸ Since polygamy increased a man's exaltation, the concept of a plurality of gods could not hold validity in Bickerton's mind. He therefore concluded that the New Testament did not suggest that men achieve godhood. Instead men received the same heavenly reward as Christ. He now thought God assigned deceased men as joint heirs to His eternal kingdom rather than granting them His omnipotent power. After some reconsideration, Bickerton's doctrinal understanding about eternity retreated back to Protestant tradition. He saw a similar relationship between baptism for the dead too because it connected families together eternally and granted exaltation to those who practiced it. Bickerton felt that the Mormon Church used earlier revelations to create new doctrines, and he saw flaws in Mormon theology.³⁹

Bickerton now faced a conundrum. Twice he had abandoned Mormon leaders whom he thought had perverted the Restored Gospel. How could he feel the Holy Spirit's authority in two churches, only to become disaffected? Bickerton had to reevaluate his thoughts regarding Smith, Rigdon, and Young. Otherwise, his conviction in the Restored Gospel would seem unfounded. Bickerton decided that although Joseph Smith had created unorthodox doctrines, he still fulfilled some of God's latter-day plans. "The Lord in his wisdom passed by all the great men of learning and refinement and revealed himself unto that obscure young man name[d] Joseph Smith," he later wrote, "who was honored of God with the visitation and ministry of angels, was made instrumental in the hands of the Lord of translating the Book of Mormon from Egyptian hieroglyphics . . . and was entrusted with the Holy priesthood of Jesus Christ." Despite his failings, Bickerton thought Smith had received the priesthood authority and the gift of prophecy. Smith had translated the Book of

³⁸Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 3.

³⁹For more information about Bickerton's doctrinal beliefs, see *ibid.*, 9–14.

Mormon and accepted a mandate to cry “repentance unto the people declaring the hour of God’s judgement had come.” In Bickerton’s mind, Smith had initiated the last mission to preach repentance to the world. As history proved, Smith’s message did convert thousands and scared thousands more. Bickerton declared, “And Joseph like all the prophets and apostles which were before him suffered persecutions, and at last, death at the hands of a ruthless mob in Carthage Jail in the State of Illinois in a land of religious liberty.” Smith’s affirmation of the Book of Mormon had branded him as a heretic. Over time, Smith had become politically powerful and introduced unconventional doctrines, but to Bickerton, these were only minor reasons why Americans became fearful. He believed the fundamental reason for Smith’s assassination was because people saw the Book of Mormon as evil. He believed several people had refused to open their minds. They had hardened their hearts and rejected the fullness of the Gospel, persuading themselves to murder the man whom God used to publish the holy text. Bickerton stated, “The wisdom of God in every generation has been foolishness with men. . . . Yet on earth he [Smith] was not suffered to live in his own land and enjoy the privilege of worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”⁴⁰ Bickerton believed Smith had died as a result of his preaching the Restored Gospel.

Sidney Rigdon presented similar issues for Bickerton. The first time he heard Rigdon preach, he remembered that Rigdon displayed the power of God. Then when Rigdon proved himself as an incompetent leader, Bickerton wondered whether Rigdon had lied about Young’s practice of plural marriage. Only after joining Young’s church did Bickerton realize Rigdon’s accusations were correct. When Young’s polygamous beliefs were exposed, Bickerton reconsidered Rigdon’s divine authority, as well as his own. First, he concluded that the presidency of the Mormon Church rightfully belonged to Rigdon. As Smith’s first counselor, he believed Rigdon should have received the appointment. Bickerton wrote, “At his [Smith’s] death the Church was broken up and Brigham Young assumed authority which did not properly belong to him.”⁴¹ Second, when Bickerton received his baptism and ordinations in 1845, he had concluded Rigdon still held the priesthood authority.⁴² By asserting that Rigdon

⁴⁰Ibid., 3.

⁴¹Ibid., 3.

⁴²Ibid., 5.

defected only after he received his ordinations, Bickerton staked a claim to the priesthood authority. This is why he believed he carried the Holy Ghost in both Rigdon's and Young's churches. Bickerton believed that he had followed God's commandments unabated. He affirmed that the defections of neither Rigdon nor Young had swayed him from the Lord's work.

Bickerton held the greatest indignation against Young. When Young had publicly endorsed plural marriage, Bickerton thought he apostatized from God's priesthood. He explained, "They do not follow Joseph Smith nor yet the Book of Mormon. [T]hey have sunk into adultery and lasciviousness, they had the way of truth, but they have departed from it." In Bickerton's mind, Young's actions had labeled him as a hypocrite and liar. Bickerton grew so disgusted with Young that in the end he blamed the whole polygamous system on him. Bickerton applied the Apostle Peter's words to describe Young's Latter-day Saints. "They walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness," he asserted, "and despise government, they are presumptuous and selfwilled, and speak evil of the things that they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption."⁴³ Bickerton firmly believed the United States would resist the Mormons, a people who, in his mind, ignored antibigamy laws and God's proper marriage covenant. Like the federal government, he planned to withstand Young.

Despite Bickerton's reevaluations, he wondered how he could continue to preach the Restored Gospel. He knew that he could not join another Mormon sect. It seemed that all the leaders who believed in the Book of Mormon either endorsed plural marriage, baptism for the dead, or godhood. He could not find a Mormon sect that did not esteem Joseph Smith's later teachings. This predicament weighed heavily on his mind. "Here I was left to myself," he remembered. "I paused to know what course to follow. I know [m]y calling was from heaven, and I also know that a man cannot build up the Church of Christ without divin[e] command from the Lord, for it would only be sectarianism and man's authority." As he stood in contemplation, he received a revelation: "But the Lord did not leave me. No, he showed me a vision, and in the vision I was on the highest mountain on the earth: he told me if I did not preach the Gospel, I would fall into a dreadful chasm below, the sight there was awful."⁴⁴ The vision

⁴³Ibid., 3; see also 2 Peter 2:10–22.

⁴⁴Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5.

astounded Bickerton. Its symbolism strengthened his conviction in the Restored Gospel and his calling as a prophet. His placement on the world's highest mountain indicated that God saw him as the last man willing to preach the Gospel in its purity. He stood alone, overlooking the earth as the Lord gave him instructions. God gave Bickerton only two options. He could continue to preach the Gospel, using only the Bible and Book of Mormon as holy texts, or he could plummet into a dark chasm, presumably the place where Brigham Young and others had stumbled. Bickerton now believed that he received a divine confirmation that all the other Mormon prophets had departed from the truth. The vision showed Bickerton that he was the only man left to build up God's kingdom on earth. He needed to preach the Gospel, share the priesthood authority, and prepare the world for the Millennium. "I was left alone," he later remarked. Nevertheless, "I moved with fear, having the Holy Spirit with me."⁴⁵ There is no definitive evidence when Bickerton had his vision of the mountain and chasm, but he most likely received the revelation in 1852 after his departure from Young's Mormon Church.

Bickerton first mentioned his revelation of the mountain and chasm in 1863 in *The Ensign*. The tract publicized the history and doctrine of his new church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—colloquially referred to as the Church of Jesus Christ. He most likely reused the name of the Mormon Church to signify his organization's apostolic theology and to emphasize the imminent Second Coming. In 1903, he recorded the vision again in his autobiography with a minor addendum. Bickerton related that he "was carried away in the spirit and placed on a high mountain just room enough for me to stand." If he did not preach the Gospel, the Lord told him that he would "fall and be torn into bits."⁴⁶ Yet the most startling and the most telling similarity of both accounts is neither version mentions his ten-month stint with Brigham Young. According to both accounts, Bickerton had received the revelation sometime after he left Rigdon's Church of Christ. His refusal to acknowledge his previous affiliation with Young reveals the repugnance that he had for the Mormon Church. Bickerton regretted joining Young's organization, and he hoped to place a wide gulf between his religious group and the Mormons, especially since Congress had passed the Morrill

⁴⁵Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2; Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5.

⁴⁶Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2.

Anti-Bigamy Act.⁴⁷ In the eyes of several Americans, the Mormon Church had perverted the Christian religion and had derided republican democracy. Bickerton, who supported this national mood, hoped to show the public why his faith and ministry opposed Mormonism. "Here I was, none to assist me," he declared in *The Ensign*, "without learning, popular opinion against me, and the Salt Lake Mormons stood in the way."⁴⁸

Yet Bickerton knew that his reputation as a former Mormon elder preceded him. Despite his zeal, his Mormon congregation in West Elizabeth still did not know whether to join his defection. Nonetheless, Bickerton professed that he had to move forward. "I could not turn back unto Methodism again, no, I know they had not the Gospel[.] I stood in contemplation. The chasm was before me, no other alternative but to do my duty to God and man."⁴⁹ His mission to preach the Restored Gospel became more than a divine errand, but a battle against Young's alleged hypocrisy. Therefore, Bickerton resolved to separate the Book of Mormon from Young's Mormonism.

Once again Bickerton found himself detached from a church, trying to understand how to continue his prophetic mission. His previous Mormon congregation, after hearing Brigham Young's official admission of plural marriage, eventually returned to him, placing him yet again as the head of a religious group with very little financial support. He had three small children, and his youngest, Josephine, at age three, died in September 1852.⁵⁰ Dorothy gave birth to another daughter, Clara Virginia, the next year. With children to feed, his household finances most likely buckled. Surprisingly, he never mentioned his family or monetary burdens. His out-of-body revelation became an anchor that secured his faith.⁵¹

To support his family, Bickerton continued to work in the coal mines. That gave him an opportunity to share his Gospel message.

⁴⁷Claudia Lauper Bushman and Richard Lyman Bushman, *Building the Kingdom: A History of Mormons in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 66–67; Turner, *Brigham Young*, 322–23.

⁴⁸Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰"Record of Church Under William Bickerton Before Incorporation, May 25, 1851–January 29, 1859," Erskine Scanned, Vol. 1 from microfilm, CD 1, Strip 3, 1 and 2, Lamb Foundation Archive, Albuquerque, N.M.

⁵¹United States Census, West Elizabeth, Allegheny County, Penn., June 25, 1860.



William Bickerton and his family, circa mid-1860s. Courtesy of the St. John News.

“I went ahead preaching repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” he recalled.⁵² His simple message converted four men who worked under him. Bickerton had previously converted his workmate Charles Brown, who fellowshipped with him since his departure from Sidney Rigdon’s church. Later, William Bacon and Daniel Davidson converted. Then Bickerton’s older brother, Thomas, joined the faith. In 1849, Thomas had traveled west in search of gold in the California mines. Unlike most of the treasure seekers who did not find their anticipated fortunes, Thomas became successful at finding gold. With hopes of pursuing gold mining further, he returned to Wheeling, Virginia, to retrieve his family to bring them out West. However, his wife, Eliza, refused to support Thomas’s second venture.

⁵²Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 5.

She convinced him to stay in the East. Yielding to her wishes, Thomas moved his family to West Elizabeth. He later found employment as a coal miner under his younger brother's supervision.⁵³

After working long hours in the mines, Bickerton preached to his neighbors. On Sundays, his day off, "I held outdoor meetings sometimes in the market place, sometime[s] in public houses, on streets or any other available place."⁵⁴ The wharfs on Market Street, located on the west and east banks of the Monongahela River, docked steamboats that connected Elizabeth Township to the outside world. The ferries brought goods for the local stores, supplies for the town's industries, and daily newspapers from Pittsburgh. When a steamboat blew its whistle, residents would congregate by the dock. The riverfront was a bustling area where people bought goods, read daily headlines, and socialized. Ferries arrived at noon and in the evening, providing boats to travel up and downstream. The township's own steamboat, when it arrived from Pittsburgh, promoted a leisurely atmosphere where townsfolk gathered.⁵⁵ Along this strip, Bickerton declared his Gospel message, hoping to gain new converts. As he recalled, he held his first meeting "beside the ferry, at a store house door." During the service, a woman walking by stopped to hear him preach. As she listened, she "testified to the gospel" and later received baptism.⁵⁶

He held almost no apprehension about preaching in public. He taught about Jesus Christ in a manner similar to the original apostles. He recalled, "I held these outdoor meetings and many were convinced, and several were baptized."⁵⁷ Unlike most ministers in the United States who earned their salaries and reputations by gathering congregants in an established church building, Bickerton walked the streets, talking directly to people as they conducted their daily lives.

⁵³Idris A. Martin and John E. Mancini, eds., "The History of the Church of Jesus Christ: May 25, 1851 thru October 7, 1905 Along with Commentary by Idris A. Martin—Assistant General Church Historian," 2, Historical Archive (hereafter Church Minutes); Jordan, *Genealogical and Personal History of Western Pennsylvania*, 2:1029. Alexander Robinson, *The Passing of the Torch: William Bickerton* (unpublished manuscript in possession of the author), 13.

⁵⁴Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2.

⁵⁵Richard T. Wiley, *Elizabeth and Her Neighbors* (Butler, Penn.: Ziegler Company, 1936), 116.

⁵⁶Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 2.

He did not take a salary for preaching, nor did he expect his converts to help support his family. Bickerton literally followed Christ's words: "Freely ye have received, freely give."⁵⁸ "I then went to Allegheny City," he remembered, "had good meetings there" and later established a church branch in the town. On his own initiative he continued to have success. "I baptized a family, on the hills opposite Pittsburgh," he stated, "and also baptized a good many at Six-Mile Ferry; and had a good many members at Pine Run." By the end of 1852, Bickerton rebaptized his one-time Mormon congregation and started to develop a real church with members surrounding the Pittsburgh area.⁵⁹

As Bickerton's church started to grow, Orson Pratt started his own mission to spread the news about plural marriage. In September 1852, Pratt left Utah for Washington, D.C., to defend the doctrine in the eastern states. Then in January 1853, he started a monthly publication, entitled *The Seer*, to promote and clarify the Mormon Church's doctrines.⁶⁰ When news reached Bickerton about Pratt's periodical, he obtained a copy. After realizing what Pratt hoped to accomplish, he called a meeting to discuss the publication. Bickerton stated, "As far as I can judge, he published this to show that this was their faith and salvation, and to show that the constitution of the United States allowed every man to serve God according to the dictates of his ownself, so that they would not be molested by the government." He judged Pratt's periodical as nothing more than a political ploy and used the periodical to substantiate his church's virtue. "Now you will see by this false revelation that they were rejected," he declared, "and that we were accepted, having the Keys of Peter."⁶¹

The same winter Pratt published *The Seer*, Bickerton remembered, "There was a Latter Day Saint that was on his way to Nawvan [Nauvoo], but was delayed on account of the river freezing and did not reach his destination that winter." As the migrant endured the frigid air, he heard for several nights "singing in the air of the line of Zion, and he thought he would follow the sound to where it would lead him." Traveling for about one hundred miles, the man came to stop right

⁵⁸Matthew 10:8.

⁵⁹Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2; Victor Emanuel Bean, Journals, 1884–89, Vol. 4:3–4, Church History Library, History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

⁶⁰Orson Pratt, *The Seer* 1, no. 1 (1853): 12–13; see also Turner, *Brigham Young*, 234.

⁶¹Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 7.

in front of Bickerton's home. "He did not know there was a Latter Day Saint anywhere near," Bickerton stated, firmly believing that the man could only have found his home by the Holy Spirit's direction.⁶² It appeared to Bickerton that the Lord had started to gather lost and jaded Mormons to the haven of his church.

Bickerton's other recollections of this period are filled with elation. He wrote, "The sick are often healed in our midst by following the instruction of James (5th Ch.): [if there is] any sick among you let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him anointing [*sic*] him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord will raise him up." He further attested that "some have unknowingly drank poison and it has not hurt them. . . . Some have been healed of deafness, and devils have been cast out, and the power of God is made manifest amongst [*sic*] us according to our faith." Bickerton professed to experience the spiritual gifts that were promised in the New Testament. He declared that the priesthood authority carried by his church not only saved souls, but healed individuals from sickness and handicaps. He thought these experiences gave his group reason to "rejoice in the everlasting gospel, in all its power and glory, by the angel of God's presence in these last days."⁶³ By the end of 1854, Bickerton's church had at least sixty members. Although the growth of his group was fairly small compared to others in his day, what is clear is that new members continued to steadily join the Church of Jesus Christ anticipating to see the powerful manifestations that its leader had promised them.⁶⁴

The greatest manifestation of God's power that Bickerton's followers hoped to see was the gathering of Israel. In 1855, as the United States continued to quarrel over slavery, Bickerton felt compelled to warn his church members about the impending fulfillment of prophecy. Right when the nation started to again break into violence and political conflict, Bickerton stated that it was not too far distant when the tribes of Israel would gather into Zion. At a spring conference, Bickerton reminded his congregants: "The faith of this Church is the same as it ever has been, that the Lord by His power, brought forth the Book of Mormon, which is a record of the Ancient inhabitants of America, which were a branch of the house of Israel, and that this Book agrees in testimony and doctrine with the Bible and contains

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Bickerton et al., *The Ensign*, 4.

⁶⁴Church Minutes, 7.

much plainness upon the principals of the Gospel of Christ, and the gathering of Israel from their long dispersion, back upon their own land, which we think will not be long.”⁶⁵

Bickerton witnessed the United States moving closer toward a bloody sectional contest. Since his first introduction to the Restored Gospel, he believed that the Civil War—a conflict which would inevitably unleash God’s wrath upon the United States and set the path for Jesus and the Choice Seer to gather the tribes of Israel into Zion—drew nearer every day. Now he saw the fruition of his premonition coming true.⁶⁶

One of the greatest sins that Bickerton believed provoked God’s wrath upon the United States was slavery. Bickerton entirely objected to the institution. To contemporaries, he was an abolitionist—an individual who advocated for the dissolution of slavery. Although most Northerners abhorred slavery, they almost never considered blacks as equal to whites politically or racially. Blacks were genetically inferior, most Northerners claimed, and did not have the same intellectual capabilities as whites. Bickerton, therefore, was a rarity within the United States. He viewed blacks as equals. He offered them membership in his church and did not bar them from holding priesthood offices.⁶⁷ Even among Mormons, who offered church membership to blacks, Bickerton was an anomaly. Under Young, Mormons did not allow blacks to hold priesthood positions.⁶⁸

Bickerton did not explain in depth why he detested slavery, but when examining his religious thoughts in light of his socioeconomic environment, it is possible to deduce his rationale. Bickerton probably sympathized with blacks for three reasons. The first is because the Bible and Book of Mormon contain several instances where slavery is discouraged and equality is demanded.⁶⁹ The second reason is because he too was trapped in a form of economic slavery. Manual laborers received very low wages in the United States and were often

⁶⁵Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶Eric H. Walther, *The Shattering of the Union: America in the 1850s* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2004), 46.

⁶⁷Larry Watson, “The Church of Jesus Christ (Headquartered in Monongahela, Pennsylvania), Its History and Doctrine,” in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism Within Mormonism*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2007), 204.

⁶⁸Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 288.

⁶⁹Galatians 3:28.

left to fend for themselves. In most lower-class American households, fathers and mothers worked, and children commonly had jobs too. Bickerton probably would not have thought his life worse or equal to African slaves, but he certainly could have related to their harsh realities. The final reason is he probably witnessed the practice while living in Wheeling, Virginia.

As the United States continued to split over its ideals, Bickerton realized that his church was not immune to the same problem. In 1855, he found that Young's theology attracted some of his congregants away and discovered that controversy existed within his own priesthood. Details about both incidents are scant, but they are nonetheless telling. Sometime in 1855 a council meeting was held by the ministry to discuss how to handle members who believed in Young's doctrines. After some deliberation, the elders stated:

As some individuals has [*sic*] been inclining to the people of Salt Lake and their doctrine of Polygamy and other false and abominable doctrines, we have felt it our duty while sitting in Counsil [*sic*] before the Lord, that all who holds such doctrines, after due examination before witnesses, shall be cut off from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as the spirit may direct, and shall have no fellowship with the Saints.

Elders present in Council.

William Bickerton

Charles Brown

Thomas Bickerton

Jacob Stranger⁷⁰

Unfortunately, it is not known how many left Bickerton's church. Nor is it possible to pinpoint why some members felt inclined to leave. Orson Pratt's periodical, *The Seer*, probably did not have any real effect on Bickerton's congregation, especially since it ended in 1854. To members without a firm faith, Bickerton's dismissal of Young's church, especially after its growing success, could have appeared odd. The doctrines of godhood, baptism for the dead, and polygamy linked families together, both on earth and in the heavens. For those who longed to have celestial relationships that paralleled those on earth, Bickerton's traditional Christian doctrine could not satisfy those needs.

⁷⁰Church Minutes, 6.

The second trial came when Elder Charles Brown chose to separate from the church. Brown challenged Bickerton's authority by luring members away and starting a new church in Bissell Town, Pennsylvania. This must have shocked Bickerton, who had a close relationship with Brown. Bickerton, since his departure from Rigdon, had united with his friend and coworker. For nearly a decade, both men had preached the Restored Gospel together, eluding the apocryphal teachings of two Mormon leaders. Now Brown had decided to forsake his compatriot altogether. It is impossible to know why Brown left, but it is apparent that Bickerton did not want him to leave.

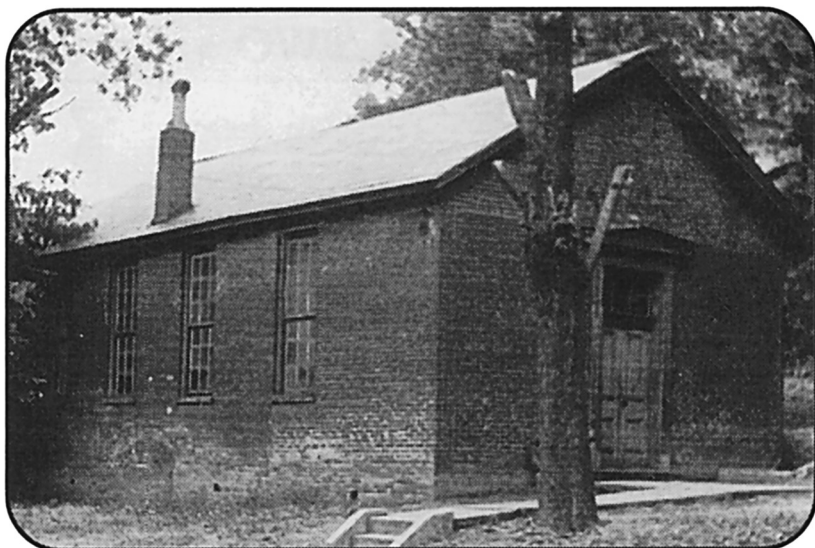
The priesthood asked three men—John Robinson, William Thews, and Thomas Bickerton—to meet with Brown to discuss his departure. The trio reported, "After trying somewhat to justify himself, he said he would submit himself into the hands of the Elders, to do what they felt to do by the Spirit, if it was to be baptized again." During their discourse, Brown's resolve to leave softened. Bickerton was too close a friend, and he still believed Bickerton had authority from God. Submitting to the priesthood, Brown received his rebaptism on April 23. With his renewed dedication, he came back into the fold, received again his position as an elder, and was forgiven.⁷¹

Possibly around this time, Brown witnessed a miracle under the hands of Bickerton that he could not refute. Bickerton remembered, "There was a woman who had been confined to her bed for five years, and the last two years she was perfectly helpless. We carried her down to Peters Creek in her bed, and it took four of us to baptize her, and when we brought her up out of the water the blood flowed from her mouth. We carried her home, confirmed her a member of the Church and attended the ordinance on her, and she was healed sound and well. She also bore children afterwards." Brown was astonished. "Brother Brown, who did not profess anything, told us he would give us credit for healing her," Bickerton recalled.⁷²

Only four years after Bickerton had abandoned Brigham Young, he managed to create a new church with dedicated members. Bickerton had never expected to find himself alone, searching the scriptures and his heart for answers. Nonetheless, his revelation of the mountain and chasm had placed him in a more significant position than he had otherwise held. He stood on a precipice, overlooking the world while the Lord's eyes were solely fixed on him. He did not have the

⁷¹Church Minutes, 8.

⁷²Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 8.



A schoolhouse in West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, that William Bickerton converted into a church building. Larry Watson, A History of The Church of Jesus Christ (Monongahela, Penn.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 2002), 2:66.

comfort of looking to higher ecclesiastical leaders for guidance, but had to look to his heart and God for direction. He had to preach on the streets, traveling miles to baptize new converts. Exact numbers are not clear, but by the time of the Civil War, Bickerton's church grew by the hundreds, and at his death forty years later in February 1905, the Church of Jesus Christ continued to have a steady following.

Sometime before he died, Bickerton reminisced on his life as a Latter Day Saint. He had summed up why he had accepted the Restored Gospel. "I was a miner all my life and never had any chance of learning or never was at school," he remembered. "During all this time I belonged to the Methodist church, up to 1845 when I went to Limetown, Washington county, Pa., to hear the Saints preach. As soon as I went in amongst them I found that they had more than I had, and I wanted to have all that the Gospel promised."⁷³ Bickerton spent the majority of his life teaching his followers that they could receive the full power of the Holy Ghost. They could prophesy, speak in tongues, receive interpretations to tongues, and see visions and

⁷³"A Pioneer Gone," *St. John Weekly News*, February 24, 1905.

dreams. He attempted to clarify and correct Mormon doctrine by preaching only from the Bible and Book of Mormon, and he occasionally referenced the Doctrine and Covenants when it suited the occasion. He declared his own prophecies and led his church with exceptional visionary power. Bickerton was a prophet among other Latter Day Saint prophets, who, like him, attempted to proliferate their own versions of the Restored Gospel and build up their own forms of Zion.



Opening the Windows of Heaven: The Bickertonite Spiritual Revival 1856—1858

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OPENING THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN: THE BICKERTONITE SPIRITUAL REVIVAL 1856–1858

Daniel P. Stone

WILLIAM BICKERTON, THE PROPHET AND LEADER of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (colloquially called the Church of Jesus Christ), had a pressing concern in 1856. Bickerton wanted to further unite his Church and spread the Restored Gospel with more zeal. He thought congregants had to feel the Holy Spirit and experience miracles if he wanted to convince them of his testimony. If members appealed to the Holy Spirit for guidance and blessings, Bickerton insisted his Church would prosper. He thought Church members had to humble themselves, repent, and only then could they boldly declare the Gospel and receive greater miracles. Bickerton believed the next few years would unravel with serious political and social conflict, so he urged his Saints to prepare for the future. A revival was the only answer. Therefore, between 1856–58, Bickerton attempted to ignite a spiritual resurgence in his Church by appealing to the Holy Spirit so that his followers could see more of God's power.

Bickerton had a lot riding on his success. Only a decade earlier, he had forsaken Sidney Rigdon's Church of Christ after learning about Rigdon's plans to build the New Jerusalem in the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania. Then, after joining Brigham Young's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1851, Bickerton had abandoned

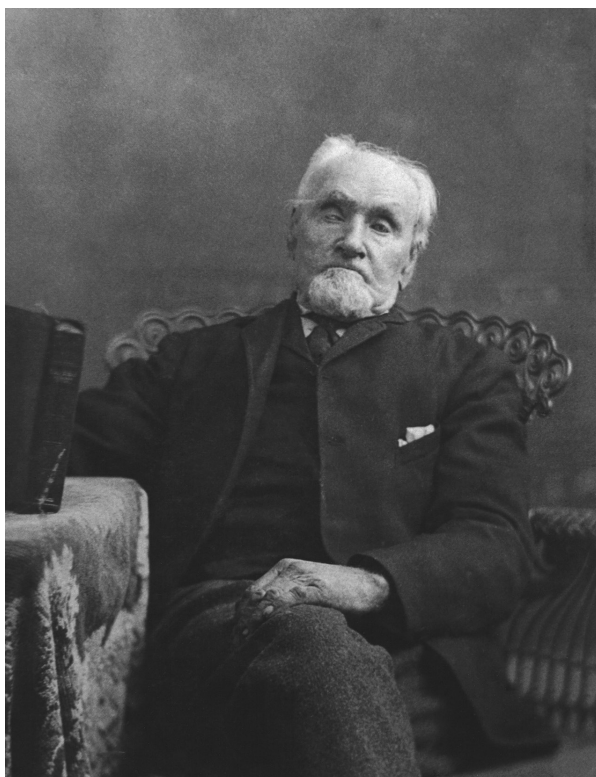
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the Mormons in 1852 after learning about Young's sanctioning of polygamy. Soon after, Bickerton had received a divine revelation that God called him to carry forth the Restored Gospel based on the original teachings of Joseph Smith. By 1856, Bickerton had converted dozens of people in Pittsburgh and the outlying region, including McKeesport, West Elizabeth, Allegheny City, Six Mile Ferry, and Pine Run.¹

When starting on his new prophetic mission, Bickerton had never realized how much commitment and skill it took to lead a church. When faced with the task, it is apparent he was quite aware of his shortcomings. He had not received a quality education, he had limited leadership experience, and he had to somehow separate his Church from an established Mormon faith. Logically, Bickerton believed he had separated his faith from Mormonism, showing his converts the alleged contradictions between Mormon doctrine and the Bible and Book of Mormon. But if he wanted to entirely separate his Church from Brigham Young, he thought converts had to witness the manifestations of God on a regular basis.

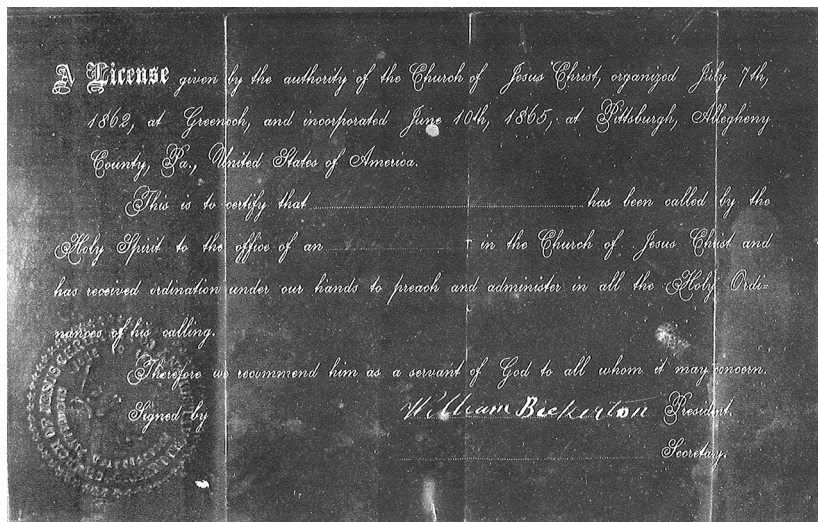
At the summer conference on July 4, 1856, Bickerton instructed members of his flock about their calling. Like other American Christians, the Saints met as a congregation on the anniversary of America's independence. However, instead of the familiar speech about political freedom, Bickerton opened the meeting with a two-hour sermon about the Restored Gospel. "Brother William Bickerton addressed the meeting, showing us the all importance of the Gospel committed to our care," Thomas Redpath recorded, "being faithfully spoken as well as believed." Bickerton then "commenced to give an outline of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints with its most special theology as the Holy Spirit might dictate and direct." History was important to Bickerton. His sermon is not recorded, but by showing how he believed the priesthood authority transitioned to himself, he

¹Daniel P. Stone, "The Rocky Road to Prophethood: William Bickerton's Emergence as an American Prophet," *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 1 (January 2017): 3–20; William Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," The Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive, Greensburg, Pa., 2 (hereafter cited as Historical Archive); Victor Emanuel Bean, *Journals, 1884–89*, Vol. 4:3–4, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Note: all quotations in the article are written as they appear in the primary sources.



William Bickerton (1815–1905), founder of The Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonite). Portrait photograph taken by W. R. Gray Studio, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Ida Long Goodman Memorial Library.

would have revealed to his Saints the great commission he thought the Lord had given them. Bickerton may have hoped to explain why God was displeased with the history of the Christian Gospel. He most likely described the apostasy and explained how the Book of Mormon had reestablished the “plain and precious” tenets of Christianity. However, Bickerton believed that Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Brigham Young had perverted the Book of Mormon’s teachings and added their own presumptions and false revelations to Mormon theology. He thought the Lord had transitioned the prophetic mantle to him, leaving the redemption of the world in the hands of his Church. In Bickerton’s mind, his Church of Jesus Christ now held the commission to battle the evils of sectarianism. By revealing the true power



Church of Jesus Christ ordination license, signed by William Bickerton. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

of the Holy Spirit, Bickerton believed that his Church could convert the world, uniting all under one religious banner.²

At the conference, a woman asked for baptism and had hands laid on her for the reception of the Holy Ghost. George Swards, James Waggoner, and George Rain were ordained elders. The Spirit was so powerful, Thomas Redpath testified, that everyone's heart was filled with "joy and gladness, as a precious fortaste of a more precious future, when He [God] shall pour out His spirit upon all flesh, when He shall reign Jehovah King over all the Earth." To Redpath, the conference contained what Joel in the Old Testament had prophesied—that God would pour out His Spirit "upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." Consequently, members of Bickerton's Church believed they held the true priesthood and it was their responsibility to prepare the world for Zion. The revival had begun.³

²Idris A. Martin and John E. Mancini, eds., "The History of the Church of Jesus Christ: May 25, 1851 Thru October 7, 1905 Along with Commentary by Idris A. Martin—Assistant General Church Historian," 9, Historical Archive (hereafter cited as Church Minutes).

³Church Minutes, 9; Joel 2:28.

As a result of this calling, people joined. Five received baptism on July 6 and two more joined on July 8. These two testified of the “heartfelt satisfaction they felt, expressing that fullness in appreciate language to the giver of all good, for His kindly care, for His everlasting unvarying love.” When the elders laid hands on Hannah Rain, she stated that the Holy Spirit came in her “in a satisfactory portion of the soft balmy soul absorbing influence.” In response, Redpath wrote a prayer in the official minutes: “All thy works praise thee, O Lord of Hosts, all thy ways are just and right. Bless and increase us O Lord, My God, Thou King of Saints prepare our Hearts to make the room, that thou mayest use us for thy honor in saving and reconciling many souls to thee.” The testimonies and prayer captured the feeling Bickerton had hoped to give his converts—the time had come for the world to know the love of the Savior.⁴

To Bickerton and his followers, it appeared God had bestowed His power on the least expected candidates, including their little children. It is no surprise that Bickerton thought about little children. His wife, Dorothy, had just given birth to a new daughter, Angeline Ann, earlier in the year. If children were the epitome of righteousness, Bickerton probably wondered, then could they partake of the Lord’s supper? To find the answer, he prayed and asked God. “The word of the Lord came upon me and did manifest, by His Holy Spirit,” Bickerton remembered, “that it was His will that children have the sacrament administered to them.” Although he had received an answer from the Lord, he still had some hesitations. Bickerton knew this practice was not common. It may have been fairly easy to convince people that children did not need baptism, but would it be the same trying to convince his Church that children should partake of communion? In his moment of apprehension, the Lord answered him again, “If my word offend, they will be offended by my presence, such can never enter into my rest.” Bickerton now believed he more clearly understood the Prophet Mormon’s words. Since children were alive in Christ, it was imperative that they partake of the Lord’s supper. If his congregants saw innocent children take part in sacrament, it could persuade them to humble themselves as a child. In turn, the Lord would find more pleasure in the Church and, therefore, bestow more of His blessings.⁵

⁴Church Minutes, 9–10.

⁵United States Census, West Elizabeth, Allegheny County, Pa., June 25, 1860; Church Minutes, 2–3.

On October 22, 1856, Bickerton called a council meeting to present the revelation. He felt that God had given the message, but he still wanted to test it with the priesthood. The elders sat together and discussed the revelation, and as they did, one of the men spoke the word of the Lord: "The Lord He is God, The Lord He is God, The Lord He is God and not Man, that He should repent, nor the Son of Man that He should lie, therefore, saith the Lord, Ye are accepted before me as a Church, for ye are not those that turn unto Satan, nor those that follow the wages of Baalam." The message was a divine sanctioning from the Lord. Although the revelation did not explicitly mention whether God wanted children to partake of sacrament, the elders apparently thought that if God had sanctioned the Church, He must have also answered their question. Over time, Bickerton's Church would eventually stop giving children sacrament, finding it unnecessary, but during this time of revival, it appears the priesthood believed the practice would further unite the Church.⁶

The testimonies of the Saints had the potential to captivate not only those who were apathetic to religion but also to Christians who had never felt the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Saints shared their testimonies, Bickerton thought people would become more interested in the Restored Gospel. Testimonies, he determined, were the key to more conversions. In 1857, at the April conference, Bickerton encouraged the congregation to share their testimonies. "If all those who had been healed by the laying on of hands would bear their testimonies to what the Lord had done for them, it might have a good effect," he declared. Compared to other churches, the Church of Jesus Christ was unique. Bickerton told his congregants, "We are a people that are separated from all other people because we stand for the faith and promises of the Gospel." The miracles of the New Testament were not just stories, he remarked, but were examples of how the Holy Spirit manifests to those who have faith.

⁶Church Minutes, 3. Children were only given sacrament until they reached the "age of accountability." In Bickerton's Church, this was an unspecified age where children understood right from wrong. Children were also considered members of the Church until they reached the age of accountability. Although Bickerton did not specify an exact age of accountability, Joseph Smith received a revelation in 1831 that children should be baptized into the church at eight years old. See Church Minutes, 94; Doctrine and Covenants 68:27.

His congregants could do more than read the scriptures; they could carry the ancient saga into modern times. As he demonstrated, the Saints could experience the New Testament.

Charles Marks rose to his feet to confirm Bickerton's words. He stated that God had healed both him and his daughter. If the Saints continued to purge their lives, Marks declared, the Church would see greater miracles. One error in particular stood out to Marks. As was common for the day, men, including some in the ministry, chewed, smoked, and sniffed tobacco. This had to stop, Marks enjoined: "The Lord required us to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and come down to the laws that the Lord required or designed us to live by." If the members laid aside tobacco, snuff, and other "detestable things," Marks promised the congregation that God would heal their afflictions. Marks had made a bold statement. He answered Bickerton's request with a testament and an admonition. As Bickerton had hoped, a zeal for righteousness began to stir the congregation.⁷

A sense of urgency continued to grow during the year. In July, Bickerton organized another conference to discuss how to spread the Restored Gospel. Preaching the word of God was important, but as Bickerton pointed out, other churches did the same. "The Gospel comes not by word only, but by power and the Holy Ghost," he proclaimed. People had to feel God's touch; otherwise, the Gospel message was no different from other Christian churches. Two members confirmed his statement. Charles Cowan spoke that it only took one sermon to convince him that the Church of Jesus Christ held the truth. The spiritual conviction he had felt was like nothing he had ever experienced. Then a compelling testimony came from a woman known as Sister Harniham. In 1832, when the Mormons had thrived in Kirtland, Ohio, she received her baptism. When the elders had laid hands on her for the reception of the Holy Ghost, they blessed her stating that she would "live to see Zion flourish." For twenty-five years she had endured persecutions. Detractors had scattered the Saints across America and had killed Joseph Smith. Now she found herself in the company of Bickerton's Church, a group that she felt had preserved the integrity of the Restoration. Harniham declared that since she had joined Bickerton's group, she had experienced the miracles of the Restoration's early years. She saw visions, the sick healed, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. In

⁷Church Minutes, 11.

her mind, the promise given to her twenty-five years ago had at last been fulfilled.⁸

The spiritual seeds Bickerton had planted in early 1857 finally appeared to sprout at the October conference. When Thomas Bickerton, William's older brother, took charge of the meeting, he strove to draw closer to God, and as he anticipated, the Lord appeared. At the start of the meeting, Thomas was impressed and told the congregation that this conference opened with more of God's love than he had ever seen. As he continued the service, he advised the Saints to listen more intently to the Holy Ghost. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God," he said. Other than one excommunication that the elders handled, the meeting went smoothly. Thomas closed the service, but as he prepared to leave, he felt an "extraordinary degree of Peace" resting in the building. Then as he walked home with Charles Brown, he felt uncomfortable. Was this the Holy Spirit moving upon him, he wondered? He questioned whether he should have left the building. Turning to Brown, he asked, "Had we not better have a meeting tomorrow?" After asking the question, immediately the Holy Spirit overcame him. Incredible "warmth and power" entered his soul. Surprised, the men then turned in the direction of William Bacon's home to tell him what had happened. Bacon, however, did not seem interested. Unabated, the men traveled to William Bickerton's house. They told him about Thomas's experience, but again, like Bacon, Bickerton did not understand why they had to hold another meeting the next day. After all, the men had to work. Confused and disappointed, Thomas and Brown returned to their homes. Except for Thomas, who planned to stay home and pray, the rest of the men expected to work in the morning.⁹

Ironically, the morning did not go as planned for any of them. As William Bacon traveled to work, he was unexpectedly detained on the road. He could not make it to his job. When William Bickerton and Charles Brown arrived at work, there was an apparent problem at the mine, so they had to return home. Jacob Stranger, who had to travel out of town for business, could not finish his journey either. When he had gone only two miles, he said that the Holy Spirit stopped him. Like the others, he had no choice but to return. The Spirit of

⁸Ibid., 12.

⁹Ibid., 13.

God, they all agreed, did not allow them to go to work. The Lord had obviously wanted them to extend the conference. As it turned out, it appeared that Thomas's premonition was correct.¹⁰

The men called for a meeting at ten in the morning, and to their delight, several people attended. During the morning service, the congregation felt the presence of the Holy Spirit so powerfully that they were "made to rejoice in the Lord." After lunch, the conference continued. The Spirit of God grew stronger, and two people asked for baptisms. Apparently, word had spread about the baptisms, and others decided to attend the conference. So many people arrived in the late afternoon that the building was full. The service did not end until the late evening, and according to the minutes, "all went to their homes thanking God for the things they had seen and heard, & felt." Bickerton must have been elated. His group had finally started to feel the Holy Spirit with more power. But even he was surprised how it happened. At first, he did not think that the October conference needed to be extended. He originally found his brother's request unwarranted. However, after realizing that Brown, Bacon, Stranger, and he himself were unable to work, he believed that God had something special in store. Bickerton was so enthralled by the weekend conference that he decided to extend it yet again. The members planned to meet three days later on Tuesday, October 6.¹¹

The Tuesday meeting was another success. Apparently, the Holy Spirit's presence was not exclusive to those who attended the conference. Bickerton's wife, Dorothy, had fallen ill and could not come to the meeting. She was "racked in pain, and could not rest anymore." She sent word and asked the elders to anoint her. When they arrived at the house, they poured a little oil on her head, laid their hands on her, and asked God to take away the pain. Immediately she was healed. These episodes apparently persuaded Bickerton to hold another meeting on Wednesday. This day, as the Saints later attested, was like no other.¹²

On Wednesday, the Saints saw more spiritual manifestations than they had otherwise experienced. William Bickerton, who many considered a prophet, exhibited the spiritual gift like never before. During

¹⁰Ibid., 13–14.

¹¹Ibid., 14.

¹²Ibid., 16.

the service, he stood up to deliver a message from God. Speaking the word of the Lord, his message must have shocked the audience:

I accept of you this day as my Church to whom my Servant John was commanded to write, while in the Spirit on the Lord[']s day, and to the angel of the church of Philadelphia write, these things, saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the Key of David, he that openeth and no man Shutteth and Shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works; behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and has kept my word, and has not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie, Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown[.] Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit Saith unto the churches.¹³

The words given through Bickerton were the exact words given to the Apostle John. For Bickerton and his followers, the message proved that God had accepted them. The Lord compared them to the ancient Church of Philadelphia, the Church that God favored the most in the book of Revelation. This Church had access to the “key of David,” symbolizing the ancient spiritual authority of Israel. The message asserted that Bickerton’s Church carried the same power that was given to King David and his most famous descendant, Jesus Christ. The message also reaffirmed to Bickerton that he had made the right decision in forsaking Brigham Young. Young had claimed that his followers were literal members of the House of Israel when they accepted the doctrines of the Mormon Church. Whether a convert was an actual descendant of Israel or a Gentile who joined the ranks, Young told his followers they had become God’s new covenant

¹³A *Book of Record of the Revelations Given unto the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 1–2, Historical Archive (hereafter cited as *Revelation Book*). See also Revelation 3:7–13.

people. Bickerton, however, viewed Young and his group as hypocrites. He believed they perverted the Gospel by supporting peculiar doctrines like polygamy and the plurality of gods. The Mormons, as Bickerton understood, were the latter-day Jewish impostors that God had described in the prophetic message. Young and his followers had become members of "the synagogue of Satan." However, as Bickerton saw it, one day God would reveal to the Mormons the error of their ways. When this happened, he thought the Mormons would humble themselves before his Church of Jesus Christ. Bickerton looked forward to the day when the Lord would vindicate his Church, but until that day, he knew that his people had to keep persevering to build up the kingdom of God. If they did, he believed his followers would receive the promises of the prophetic message.

The congregation heard two more messages during the Thursday meeting. At one point, Bickerton again stood up and declared the word of the Lord: "The Lord I am God, the Lord I am God, therefore you are of them that will not turn aside, therefore will I bless you." To confirm his statement, William Bacon stood up and proclaimed, "Try me and prove me, and see if I will not open unto you the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing so that there shall not be room enough to contain it." The congregation must have sat and marveled. The significance of Bacon's message was most likely not lost on the Saints. The Lord had challenged them with the same words He had challenged the ancient Israelites. During the time of the Prophet Malachi, the Israelites had sinned against God by not properly tithing to the Temple. As a reproach, Malachi had prophesied the exact message given through Bacon. It appeared that God was pleased with Bickerton's Church, but the message nonetheless challenged them to strive for a higher level of righteousness. If they did, God promised He would unlock the storehouses of heaven. Bickerton must have once again felt invigorated. He decided to extend the conference one more day, finally ending it on Sunday, October 11.¹⁴

Sunday's service was the culmination of a Spirit-filled fall conference. To be sure, the Saints had never experienced such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They had witnessed spiritual manifestations before, but never at this magnitude. As the members reflected on what had transpired during the last three meetings, some may have possibly wondered how they could fulfill the recently given prophecies. At

¹⁴*Revelation Book*, 2. See also Malachi 3:10.

this point in time, the Church of Jesus Christ had only a membership of about one hundred people. The time from Wednesday to Sunday may have allowed their excitement to wane and doubt to enter into their minds. Bickerton may have mentioned this during his sermon. At one point during his address, he spoke in the gift of tongues. Two women, Elizabeth Carney and Charlotte Hibbs, received the same interpretation: "Fear not my little flock for it is your Father[']'s good pleasure to give you the kingdom."¹⁵ The power of this revelation overwhelmed the congregation. When Dorothy Bickerton heard the message, she testified that "the spirit ran through her like lighting." George Rain was equally convicted. He stated that when he heard the message, he had "as clear a knowledge of it being the Word of the Lord as he has of his own existence." Sister Hambelton also agreed that she would rather die than doubt the revelation.¹⁶ A vision had by an undisclosed brother further confirmed the message. "I saw in the vision the road on which the saints were traveling on, the foot of which road was in the waters, and ascended gradually up to Heaven," he said. "It was a straight and narrow road, so narrow that there was not room to turn either to the right or to the left; and on each side of the road was all manner of beautiful flowers to tempt the saints to pluck them." The Saints, though, could not pick the flowers because "under the flowers lay a great depth of mud, so that if any one stepped aside to pluck any of the flowers they were sure to stick fast in the mud." It was apparent to the brother that the devil was trying to lure members away from the Church. However, Satan's efforts were futile. "The road itself was so firm" the brother added, "that many cannon balls that were fired at the road, could not even as much as make a mark upon it."¹⁷ God's power, Bickerton determined, was greater than any attack. It appeared the Lord had given them the kingdom and no one could take it away. The six-day conference ended with the Saints in awe.

¹⁵Church Minutes, 14.

¹⁶Ibid., 16.

¹⁷William Bickerton, Charles Brown, George Barnes, William Cadman, and Joseph Astin, *The Ensign: Or a Light to Lighten the Gentiles, in Which the Doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Is Set Forth, and Scripture Evidence Adduced to Establish It. Also, a Brief Treatise upon the Most Important Prophecies Recorded in the Old and New Testaments, Which Relate to the Great Work of God of the Latter Days* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Ferguson & Co., 1863), 6–7, typescript in Historical Archive.

At last, the Church had a fervent zeal to preach. Since 1852, Bickerton had hoped for this. Ironically, a Mormon elder, Samuel Woolley, had informed Bickerton sometime in 1857 of his official excommunication from the LDS Church, but this did not matter to Bickerton. He believed that he had received a higher calling.¹⁸ With renewed efforts, in 1858, two new branches of his Church opened, one in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and the other in Wheeling, Virginia. The Church of Jesus Christ had now reached the towns where Bickerton had boldly defied Brigham Young and where he had spent his teenage years. Church membership was growing every year. For Bickerton, this was proof that God had ordained his ministry. In April 1858, he proudly declared, "God is amoungst us and blesses us and especially to prepare a people for his second coming of the Messiah, and we are under the renewed covenant and we are thankful that God is with us indeed." Bickerton sincerely thought his Church had the keys to peace and prosperity. He believed they could save the country, and the world, from total disaster.¹⁹

Indeed, this was a crucial latter-day mission that could also help further unite his Church. In 1858, sectional conflict in the United States was even more apparent, moving the nation ever closer to the Civil War. Congress hotly debated the fate of Kansas, discussing the legitimacy of its proslavery state government, with secessionists from the South becoming more vocal. Bickerton prepared his Church for the inevitable. Destruction, like no one had ever experienced, lay just over the horizon.

Joseph Smith had described this destruction in detail back in 1832. Smith had prophesied that South Carolina would secede from the Union, swallowing the United States into an internal conflict. In that same year, Andrew Jackson's administration had endured the Nullification Crisis. A South Carolina convention had unilaterally nullified the federal tariffs of 1828 and 1832 since they had hindered plantation owners' cotton profits and their purchase of cheap textiles from England. To quell the political rebellion, Jackson had almost dispatched federal troops into the state.²⁰ Smith, like the rest

¹⁸Eli Kendall, "The Other Side," *St. John Weekly News*, July 19, 1889.

¹⁹Church Minutes, 17; William H. Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Monongahela, Pa.: The Church of Jesus Christ, 1945), 1:28.

²⁰Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press), 395–410.

of Americans, had read the national reports concerning this issue, which very well could have influenced his prediction. Bickerton, who had lived in the United States since 1831, had also encountered the ongoing conflict between the states and the federal government and, like most Americans, feared a bloody contest. Bickerton knew that Smith's prophecy foretold plausible events.

During the Civil War, Smith had predicted that "the Southern States, shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and thus war shall be poured out upon all nations." Then "slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for war." The American Indians "will marshal themselves, and shall become exceeding angry, and shall vex the Gentiles [Americans] with a sore vexation." Smith then concluded:

And thus, with the sword, and by bloodshed, the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lighting, also shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed, hath made a full end of all nations! . . . Wherefore, stand ye in holy places, and be not moved, until the day of the Lord come; for behold it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.²¹

Bickerton and his Saints believed that it was up to them to lay the foundation for the Millennium that would follow. In July 1858, Bickerton prophesied what the Church had to do in the upcoming years. "Harken O my people," he began, "this is the word of the Lord to you this day. The Church must be one and my people one, for unto you is committed the work of God in these last days." He continued, "And you my servants, feed the flock of God over which I have made you overseers, and great is the responsibility that is laid upon you, for unto you is given the keys of this last Ministry and the last warning voice to the world, therefore be faithful to the end of your calling."²²

²¹Doctrine and Covenants 87:1–8; see also Joseph Smith Jr., *A Prophecy by Joseph Smith: Revelation and Prophecy Given by Joseph Smith on December 25, 1832 Was Recorded in Our Record in October of 1874* (Monongahela, Pa.: The Church of Jesus Christ, n.d.), 1.

²²Church Minutes, 17.

God's message warned the Church not to fall prey to the sectionalism that had weakened the United States. As the Saints witnessed, the country was splitting at the seams. Disagreements over states' rights issues, predominantly slavery, had racked the nation since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But now, the conflict was rearing its ugly head in ways not previously seen. The Saints had to remain united while spreading the Restored Gospel so souls could receive salvation.

The message's relevance was probably not lost on the congregation. In June, after receiving his nomination from the Republican party to run for the Senate, Abraham Lincoln gave a rousing and controversial speech. With a prophetic tone, Lincoln used a statement by Jesus Christ to depict the perilous situation of the country. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." In the New Testament, Christ had commanded unity. Whether a church or a nation, the Savior warned that people could not succeed without moral cooperation. As many abolitionists had warned, the United States was splitting apart because it would not rectify the sin of slavery. To many of them, American capitalism had bred a ceaseless obsession with gaining wealth, and people continued to ignore God's commandments. Americans walked in so many ways of unrighteousness that it divided the nation. Bickerton's prophecy and Lincoln's speech evoked the same spirit of urgency. Unity was the only answer.²³

To fulfill God's commandment, the ministry created a traveling quorum at the October conference. William Bickerton, William Bacon, Charles Brown, James Wagoner, and Webster Wagoner volunteered to unite together and spread the Restored Gospel wherever they could. If they traveled in groups, the brothers believed they could act as the original apostles and achieve the same success. At the conference, the members also voiced their desire to build a Church headquarters. In April, the Church had decided to build a branch in Green Oak (also known as Greenock), Pennsylvania. To confirm their building plans, the members decided in October to pray and ask God for direction. The Lord not only answered their question, but again reaffirmed the Church's commission. James Wagoner prophesied, "Verily, Verily, thus saith the Lord, go ye forth and build me an house and dedicate it unto

²³James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 179.

me and I will fill it with my glory, And ye shall go forth from thence, Therefore, be encouraged, and go forth in my name from thence, And I will go before you; as in the Apostolic age.”²⁴ Immediately after the message, a Brother Lloyd stood up and shared a revelation that he had received at the previous April conference. When the members had voted to build the Green Oak branch, he saw a “great light come to Green Oak, and it was to spread from there to East and West and North and South.” William Bickerton, Charles Brown, and Charles Cowan then stood and sang together “The Trump of Zion” in tongues. Bickerton again arose and prophesied: “Verily, verily, thus saith the Lord, here shall ye build me a house, and verily, verily thus saith the Lord[,] Go ye forth in the name of the Lord, and the gates of Hell shall shake before you—for I will be your rearward and ye shall be multiplied.” He continued, “Therefore be strong in the might of Israel’s God, and I will bless you, because of your love upon me. Therefore I will bless you.”²⁵ A year after the memorable 1857 October conference, the Saints again experienced an exceptional outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On October 7, Bickerton explained why God continued to manifest Himself to the Saints. “There is no Church and cannot be without revelation,” he said. “We believe in the gathering of Israel, and a thorough renovation of the Earth. We believe that Christ will come soon in the clouds of Heaven. We believe that God has called us to lift the last warning voice to the inhabitants of the earth, and to tell them of the great calamities that is coming upon the earth.” The 1858 October conference was again another rally to prepare the world for the Second Coming. Time was of the essence. To answer the call, another man, Mel McLac’lin, repented his sins and became a member of the Church.²⁶

Since 1857, the Church had received numerous manifestations. As God kept talking to the Church, a new question arose: what should they do with the revelations? One woman believed to have the answer. One night, this undisclosed sister had a dream where she saw a book of “great value” to the Saints. When she shared her experience, the Saints became elated. “This book is nothing more, nor less, than the revelations and other gifts received by us,” a secretary recorded. The Church needed to keep a record of all the revelations. If they did, they could study God’s latter-day prophecies, correlate them with the

²⁴*Revelation Book*, 3.

²⁵Church Minutes, 19.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 20.

Bible and Book of Mormon, and better understand the unfolding last days. "Such is the power that shall come upon us," the secretary wrote, "that our children, and those that shall arise after us, they shall so value these revelations that they will have them published and embellished by the lives of the founders, Joseph and Hyrum Smith."²⁷ In 1833, Joseph Smith had published a collection of his prophecies and revelations and titled it the Book of Commandments. In 1835, he expanded the collection and republished it as the Doctrine and Covenants. Smith believed these revelations would help guide his Church to spiritual prosperity and knowledge. The texts were not intended to usurp the Bible and Book of Mormon but rather complement them.²⁸ However, Bickerton did not agree with all the revelations recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants. This is why he sometimes referenced certain revelations of Joseph Smith but did not accept the entire book.

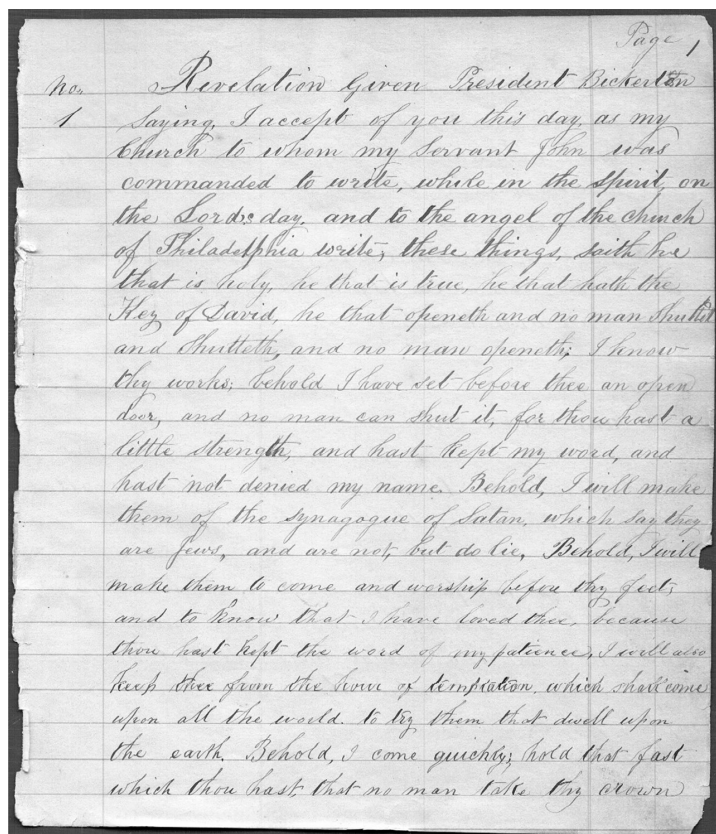
Despite his apprehension, Bickerton understood why the text had such a powerful influence on the Mormons. For Brigham Young's Latter-day Saints, the Doctrine and Covenants was another proof that God spoke directly to His people. The book was an open scriptural canon that could document the Lord's words over time. The text, therefore, was a powerful symbol of prophetic power that the Mormons used to prove their Church's spiritual authority. Yet Bickerton and his Saints believed their Church had been consecrated with God's true power. In their minds, the revelations of the past year had only proved this point. A need to keep a record of God's words was paramount to their mission. The secretary wrote, "And this is the mind of the Lord that we keep a record of these things and we ar[e] accepted by the Almighty and that where the Smiths, Joseph and Hyrum fell, we take or carry forwards the Kingdom and this Church—is a continuation of the same foundation."²⁹ Where Joseph Smith and the patriarchs of the early Restoration had failed, Bickerton believed his Church pressed forward. To him and his Saints, this book of revelations would always remind the Church of its purpose and forever enrich its posterity.

The Saints had at last tapped into the Holy Spirit. From 1856 to 1858, Bickerton and his Church had begun to unite together,

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 282.

²⁹Church Minutes, 20.



First page of the Church of Jesus Christ's revelation book. Courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ Historical Archive.

maintain repentant hearts, and trust in God's providence. It appeared the Lord's blessings were finally showered on the Saints. In the eyes of Bickerton and his followers, God had consecrated the Church, encouraged them to continue proselytizing, and sanctioned their desire to build a Church headquarters. New members continued to join, carrying personal experiences that seemed to further prove God had a special purpose for the Church.

Furthermore, in the coming years, Bickerton and his Church would realize that their premonition about impending destruction was true. In 1861, the Civil War would begin, pitting the North against the South, brother against brother, slave against free. Joseph Smith's 1832

revelation would be proven true. South Carolina would indeed secede from the Union, throwing the world's most prominent democratic republic into total chaos. Devastating destruction would ensue for the next four years. Before the war would begin, Bickerton's followers would officially acknowledge him as a prophet. The Saints would need a leader, and they found in Bickerton a spiritual prudence that could lead them through the perilous times. His leadership would turn out successful. During the Civil War, his Church's message of repentance would convert more than two hundred new members.³⁰

But for now, the Saints basked in the blessings they had received. To the joy of Bickerton, the two-year revival had strengthened the Saints' resolve to spread the Restored Gospel. While reminiscing about the 1857 October conference, a Church secretary's words appropriately summarized the entire movement. "For although none can think of the whole," he wrote, "yet what can be remembered by each, when thought of, comes with power . . . truly it was a time long to be remembered, and there are many that will have cause to thank Almighty God through time and eternity for what they received of His Spirit during these services." With dramatic intent, the secretary concluded, "Truly the set time to favor Zion was come[.] Unto God be all Glory[,] amen."³¹

³⁰Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 11.

³¹*Ibid.*, 14.

-WILLIAM- BICKERTON

FORGOTTEN LATTER DAY PROPHET

BY DANIEL P. STONE

SIGNATURE BOOKS | 2018 | SALT LAKE CITY

*for Laura & Lily,
Keith, Angie & Jared,
Emil & Yvonne
also in loving memory of John Genaro*

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INTRODUCTION

“My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. . . . Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!”

—Job 19:14–24

Prior to his death in 1905, the deposed prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ, William Bickerton, left a final message to the world when he asked apostle Allen Wright to read the nineteenth chapter of Job at his funeral. There was, of course, bitterness in this request. The onetime church president had been marginalized, his reputation tarnished by men he had mentored, who had assumed the leadership and cast him aside. Bickerton had been one of the major claimants to Joseph Smith’s position as president and prophet of the Latter Day Saint church. He had led the Pennsylvania Saints, and those of surrounding areas, by prophecy and revelation, and he had overseen a hundred-fold increase in the membership from the time he assumed responsibility. And yet, there had been a power play and he had lost. After investing everything, temporally and spiritually in the church, he saw nearly everything taken away, leaving him with an affinity for Job in the Bible and the belief that, like Job, eventually someone would set the record straight or at least attempt to tell the whole story. Over a century has passed, and his achievements and trials are still rarely spoken of among the some 23,000 adherents to the church that popularly bears his name.

That no one has previously written a book-length biography is surprising. The church Bickerton founded remains the third-largest of the Restoration movement, and although its numbers are dwarfed by the Utah-based LDS Church with almost sixteen million members and Missouri-based Community of Christ with a quarter-million members, one sees more written about James Jesse Strang of Wisconsin and Granville Hedrick of Missouri, let alone Brigham Young and Joseph Smith III, than about Bickerton. What is the reason? It is certainly not because his story lacks drama. His people lived through the Civil War, and a good number of them moved from Pennsylvania to the middle of Kansas, with all the hardships an overland migration involved and the setbacks of scraping by in an area where people had previously not lived. For a time Bickerton maintained a communal society that was awaiting the gathering of the lost tribes of Israel and Jesus's second coming. He became an opponent of polygamy. At the same time, he himself was suspected of adultery, and although the accusation was probably false, Bickerton had fraternized with female church members (walks in parks) more than common custom allowed. He made some bold theological moves, admitting African Americans and women in the ministry. He looked forward to a Native American prophet. With a life filled with unexpected twists and turns, progressive theological innovations, miracles, prophecies—even scandal—why has he been largely relegated to footnotes within Latter Day Saint history?

There are several reasons. The first is because his own followers rejected him. They came to see him the way they saw Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, as human beings who were susceptible to temptation, especially in uttering contrived, self-serving revelations alongside genuine ones. Theirs was not a rejection of real-life accomplishments or shared visions, but of leaders as role models when their behavior became suspect. In the case of Bickerton's church, its history was written by his rivals. It contains fragments of his life, the official historian, William H. Cadman, a son of Bickerton's successor, deciding that rather than dig up complicated details and engender strife, it would be better

to leave the incidents in Bickerton's life alone, thereby almost entirely removing the founder from history.

Another reason we seldom hear about Bickerton is because he did not keep a diary or leave behind other personal records for posterity, at least that are extant. We have some of his correspondence, the minutes of church meetings, and his official church writings—all invaluable in perceiving his worldview. It is, however, a tragedy that there is not more material. For example, it appears that he did not have much of a life outside of the church. That may be a false impression due to the limitations of available information. The matter is further complicated by the fact that much of the information is unavailable to the public. Only lately has the church archive been organized, and most of its holdings are restricted to church members. Because my affiliation allowed me to see documents that have not been scrutinized previously, I was introduced to aspects of the church's wonderfully rich history and insight into the founder's personal thoughts in the context of events as they happened. Most members would not have the academic training or interest to sort through random pieces of evidence to piece together a coherent narrative.

An attempt was made in 1999 when Gary R. Entz completed his doctoral dissertation, "Paradise on the Plains: The Development of Cooperative Alternatives in Kansas, 1850–1900," in which he took the first in-depth look at Bickerton and the Church of Jesus Christ in Kansas. He also published two journal articles on the topic in 2001 and 2006, and that research became a springboard for my own study. Not a church member, Entz nevertheless showed me how to write with both sympathy and scholarship, convincing me that it was possible to unravel the details of Bickerton's life for a biography. In fact, he influenced my desire to pursue a career in history.

Another model for me, especially in terms of balancing faith with the historian's obligation to rely on available evidence, was Richard L. Bushman's landmark biography, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, in which he wrote about "facing up to [Smith's] mistakes and flaws." Bushman

believed that “covering up errors makes no sense. . . . Most readers do not believe in, nor are they interested in, perfection. Flawless characters are neither attractive nor useful. We want to meet a real person.”

It is certainly true that Bickerton had flaws and strengths, also that he was very much a product of his time. Born fifteen years into the nineteenth century, and living to see the beginning of the twentieth, he saw unimaginable changes in the world. I have examined his statements and actions in context, and in doing so I have had a few basic questions in mind, such as how he understood and explained his prophetic calling and what role he imagined the converts played in fulfilling that calling. What lay behind the theological concepts he introduced? What about his family life and finances—his occupation as a coal miner? What did he think about the overall changes in the world—the political and military conflicts, mass migrations of people, discoveries, technological advances, and societal norms?

To answer these questions, I realized soon enough that I would have to get more than a superficial understanding of Bickerton's theology, which was challenging because it changed over time, and not always methodically. Most of Bickerton's views were based on his reading of the Bible and Book of Mormon, although not always in line with conventional thinking about the passages he drew from. He also occasionally drew from the Doctrine and Covenants and from other revelations of Joseph Smith, alternating between acceptance and rejection of various texts. In retrospect, this should not be surprising. Smith's revelations underwent, and continue to undergo, varied interpretations at different times by various Latter Day Saint denominations. In the hierarchy of authoritative texts, however, Bickerton held his own prophecies to be the most reliable (in tandem with the Bible and Book of Mormon). Bickerton's revelations were current and therefore most relevant, less ambiguous because they were delivered in the current idiom, and subject to subsequent clarification. It was axiomatic that the more recent the revelation, the more authoritative. Through his dialogue with the Almighty, Bickerton saw himself as elucidating and

correcting Mormon doctrine. He saw it as a partly democratic process because members were often allowed to vote on whether they accepted or rejected a given revelation and were encouraged to utter their own prophecies and interpretations. This added another level of complexity to the matter of doctrine. All the while, national, local, and personal circumstances continued to impact Bickerton's ideas and decisions. I am aware that piecing together these moving parts involves the possibility of misunderstanding them. Although I kept my conclusions close to what is more or less obvious from the available documents, I have also offered qualifiers like *maybe* whenever I have speculated.

Some historians encounter a dilemma in writing about religion and deciding whether, even in their word choices, to credit a prophet's revelations to God. It is an easier task in a biography, to the extent that a biography should more or less reflect the views of the subject. Even so, I do point out contradictions whenever Bickerton's behavior seems self-interested, reminding readers of what the church members themselves were well aware of, that no one is infallible. The members believed in revelation and received revelations themselves, so they understood the play that existed between speaking in tongues and interpreting the message, and if others felt inspired they stood or shouted their acclamation or spoke in tongues themselves. At other times they rejected a revelation. To a certain extent, one feels the same liberty today, especially with the benefit of hindsight, while simultaneously feeling impressed on many levels.

Bickerton had to contend with skeptics from outside and inside. I try to allow the detractors to speak for themselves and acknowledge a valid point or an error where appropriate. Both Bickerton and his opponents engaged in exaggeration and were guilty of incongruity. This study is not intended to determine who was right, but rather to see what the world looked like to them. In doing so, I understand that my interpretations may be challenged by believers and outsiders, including scholars, based on different criteria, no doubt. Knowing that is humbling—and certainly intimidating. Because this is the first book-length

biography, and because I cite documents not previously seen, I am burdened with having to offer interpretations without the benefit of previous comments on many of the topics by other historians. For that reason I quote liberally from the sources, giving readers a chance to better judge the validity of my perspective. As others formulate opinions contrary to mine, that will create useful dialogue, which is, after all, what makes history so interesting.

The book could not have been written without the help of Alexander Robinson. His wealth of knowledge, along with his copies of many primary documents, was indispensable in putting me on the right path at the beginning of this project. I am equally grateful to the general historian of the Church of Jesus Christ for access to the archive in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. As I searched through uncatalogued material, I found documents—the church revelation book, for instance—that were thought to have been lost, and that provided perspective I otherwise would not have had. My appreciation to John E. Mancini and the Lamb Foundation for providing invaluable digital files of photos and documents, including typescripts of minutes. I could not have begun to go into depth about the Kansas period without these resources.

I want to thank the staff of the Detre Library and Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, the Ida Long Goodman Memorial Library in St. John, the state archives at the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka, and the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City. In each case, the librarians and archivists helped me find material and patiently answered my many questions. Richard Scaglione Sr., H. Michael Marquardt, and James and Deanna McKay similarly provided me with direction and assistance throughout this project. My gratitude to members of the Church of Jesus Christ Detroit Branch #2 Ladies Circle and others who read chapters and offered criticism: John Genaro, Judy Salerno, Richard and Lani Moore, Jan Bork, Gary Coppa, Anne Johns, Teresa Pandone, and John Straccia. My appreciation to Jason Francis of Signature Books and Kevin Coppa for enhancing the

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Lastly, I want to thank the God to whom Bickerton gave reverence. Without him, Bickerton may never have lived the life that made this biography possible.

SIX

PROPHET AND SEER

1859–61

“I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I sent forth my servant Joseph [Smith], with a message of glad tidings to this generation; Him have they slain, saith the Lord; my people they have persecuted, scattered, and driven out, yet once again, I have raised up another like unto Joseph, to lead forth my people; him shall ye hear in all things.”

—revelation, Webster Wagoner, Dec. 11, 1859

From 1859 to 1861, Americans watched the final events unfold that would trigger Southern secession. They understood that war was increasingly inevitable. The North had developed armaments that would make the conflict catastrophic. In the South, aside from reliance on cotton as the main cash crop and the plantation culture surrounding it, Southerners worried about their constitutional right to own slaves, their state sovereignty being threatened.

William Bickerton looked beyond the contentiousness to the prophecies in the Book of Mormon promising that in the day of “vengeance and fury,” Christ would establish his church in a city of refuge, the New Jerusalem.¹ The prophet felt his commission from God was to be in place to assist in building Zion, seeing himself in the very role the ancient biblical prophets had foretold. If Utah Mormons considered their leader to be a latter-day Moses, then Bickerton

1. 3 Ne. 21:21–23.

was Joshua, succeeding where Moses failed, leading his people to the promised land.

At the January 1859 conference, other biblical parallels were mentioned. Bickerton addressed the congregation to tell them that “we are now acting the part of John the Baptist, to prepare a people for, and a way for, the second coming of Christ, and here we stand, waiting for the glorious appearing of the Son of God.”² Once again the message would be the same as preached by Jesus’s cousin, John: “Repent ... for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). There was significance in other scriptural passages, as well, such as where John the Revelator is given a book by an angel who says, “Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey” (Rev. 10:9). To Bickerton, this probably addressed how comforting the enlightenment of revelation was, but how depressing it was to realize how dark the future looked. “The people believe anything,” he complained. “They listen to anything, [other] than the voice of inspiration in our day and generation. But the time now is, that God does speak to us,” he said, “for there is but one Holy Spirit, and you cannot adulterate it.”³

Ministers were chosen in Bickerton’s denomination based on their spiritual gifts, as was Mel McLac’lin after he spoke in tongues at the January 1859 conference. His message was interpreted to mean that he had a special calling. It was God’s will, James Wagoner declared, that McLac’lin be ordained an elder. There was “never ... clearer evidence,” according to the secretary. Nor could there be clearer evidence of the decentralized administration in the church, which would pose a problem going forward. The ministers meeting together the next day concluded that God had indeed called McLac’lin to be an elder, and there was nothing for them to do short of ordaining him.

At the next conference held in April, the elders resisted Bickerton’s intent to see the word preached throughout the entire world. When Charles Cowan arose and spoke in tongues, Bickerton took the

2. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 21.

3. Ibid.

opportunity to emphasize the necessity of their outreach to the world, interpreting the message as this:

Verily, verily, thus saith the Lord, I will not accept of this conference because of the coldness and carelessness of some of you, O ye Elders, and shall I bless you? and ye so indifferent? Nay, verily, nay, But verily, thus saith the Lord, oh ye Elders, say no more that ye have obstacles in the way, say no more that ye have hinderences in the way. For I have commanded you to go forth, and I will sweep away those obstacles, and I will sweep away those stumbling blocks, Amen.⁴

Surprisingly, the elders accepted the rebuke and made an about-face. They began looking into more specific ways to alter their course to be more receptive to God's word. Four people attending the meeting as outsiders were so impressed by the sense of God's presence in the room that they asked for baptism the next day. In a conference session held three months later on July 4, 1859, Bickerton arose and channeled God's voice to say, "Verily, verily, thus saith the Lord, ... my peace shall rest upon you, and ye shall be blessed, for ye shall be led forth by my Spirit in ways of truth and holiness." To reap this reward, the men would have to go out into the streets and preach repentance. Three men spoke in tongues the next day to confirm this message. "Cleanse my church from iniquity and I will bless you," God said through the interpretation.

Taking the message literally to mean that before they went out into the world, they needed to purify the church itself, they began compiling a comprehensive list of members in each branch and making notes about their activity and degree of faithfulness in such areas as attendance. Those who were passive in their devotion or had committed serious sins were to be stricken from the rolls. We can see in this that the church members considered their salvation to be a collective endeavor, the individual's duty being that of following the decisions arrived together. In addition, they were expected to help each other

4. "Book of Record," 4.

by rebuking disobedience and keeping the congregation pure, by removing those who were unworthy of membership. By judging each member, it helped others from falling into idleness or sin, and thereby the whole church benefitted. In one instance when Charles Cowan was overcome by the Spirit, the Lord instructed the elders to first find out why members were being negligent, "then if they will not do their duties, cut them off, and I will bless you, and ye shall be blessed and multiplied, Amen."⁵ Eventually the church would determine that a periodic review of individual worthiness was not the best approach to personal righteousness. Instead, it tended toward pharisaical divisions. For the time being, it was assumed that discipline was the best way to keep everyone on the right path.

It is true that their lives became more focused by this kind of single-mindedness, every exertion being made in the direction of personal perfection. Their intent was to be pure enough to survive the societal destruction that was assumed to be imminent. First they looked inward to cleanse themselves, before they attempted to put the nation in order, or to gather the righteous from within the surrounding society. If they were going to be an example to the world, they needed to be perfected through unity, through unequivocal leadership and the imposition of harmony. This is what Charles Brown perceived on July 5 when he declared that God wanted Bickerton to be formally ordained head of the church. Immediately several men seconded the motion, saying "the time was come for the setting in order of the Church" and that "William Bickerton was called of God a Prophet and Seer."⁶

One of the members, William Bacon, channeled the voice of Christ to declare, "Ye shall not have it to be said unto you where is your prophet, or that you have no prophet; For this day, I set him forth before you, and he shall no longer be weak, and leave the church weak and out of Order; For, thus saith the Lord, be it known unto you my people, that from this day forth you shall look unto him as your leader, Amen."

5. *Ibid.*, 5; Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 22–23.

6. Martin and Mancini, 23.

And that was that, except for Bacon's clarification "that although it was only now that he [Bickerton] is set forth by the Church, yet, he had the gift of Prophecy since his first ordination." Even in the middle of that thought, Bacon was suddenly interrupted by the Lord speaking through him saying "that ye must acknowledge his [Bickerton's] Authority[,] and those that will not do so will lose the Spirit, Amen."⁷

It is interesting that with so many men speaking the mind of God, Bickerton's gift of prophecy was evidence of his calling, not that his position was a temporary necessity. With their lack of education and wealth, perhaps Bickerton was seen as one among equals or a fulfillment of God's word to Peter in the New Testament (Acts 2:17) that "in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." In any case, several men confirmed God's voice to them calling Bickerton as the prophet. What it meant for the men to say by revelation that Bickerton was a prophet may have had to do partly with Bickerton's track record. The evidence is that he was not considered infallible. It may have been a vote of confidence that the Holy Spirit would continue to show him the right direction for the church.

In keeping with other ordinations, Bickerton's feet were washed (not his entire body, as Rigdon would have done) and his head anointed with oil. Then the elders surrounded him, laid their hands on his head, and uttered a prayer, at which the Spirit fell upon them and Bickerton and Charles Brown began speaking in tongues as confirmation that God was "seal[ing] the office upon him," the minutes read.

As someone holding the prophetic office, Bickerton's calling, somewhat distinct from that of the others in the congregation, was to see the future. He had other roles, as well. He was called a seer, with a more specific meaning related to the uncovering of hidden mysteries from the past. He was also thought to be able to perceive God's mind and will for the present. In the Bible, the distinction between prophets and

7. "Book of Record," 6; Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 24.

seers was that seers observed and perceived the meaning of prophecies. Sometimes the prophets, speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, were unaware of what they were saying or what the meaning was.⁸ In the Book of Mormon, this is even more clear. A seer is someone who translates ancient records and “can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known” (Mosiah 8:17).

The seers in the Book of Mormon were those who translated ancient texts through devices called the “interpreters,” or what Joseph Smith called the Urim and Thummim. Smith had in mind two stones that in the Bible priests used in some manner similar to casting lots to ask questions of God.⁹ The angel Moroni told Joseph Smith that “the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times.”¹⁰ David, for instance, fought the Amalekites and inquired of the Urim and Thummim whether he would “overtake them?” The Urim and Thummim responded, “Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all” (1 Sam. 30:8). The stones are first mentioned in the second book of the Old Testament, but without mentioning their origin. It is explained in the Book of Mormon by connecting seer stones to the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel. The Book of Mormon tells that, before sending a man named the “brother of Jared” and his family and friends to the New World in eight ships, Christ appears and gives them two stones, saying, “Wherefore I will cause in my own due time that these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write” (Ether 3:23–24). Later in the Book of Mormon, these stones are used by a Nephite king

8. See 2 Kings 17:13. The Hebrew words translated as seer (*ra'ah*, *chazah*, *choseh*) mean to see, gaze at, or envision.

9. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6–10; 1 Sam. 14:42; 30:8; 1 Chron. 24:31; 25:8; 26:13–14.

10. Recounted in Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 39–40.

to translate the records of Jared's people years after their disappearance; the stones are then placed with the Nephite records by one Moroni, in order to be retrieved later by Joseph Smith. Portions of the plates were left untranslated, according to Joseph Smith, including a revelation to the brother of Jared covering the entire history of the world—past, present, and future—including things God did not want to have disclosed. When he had finished the Book of Mormon transcription, Smith gave the plates and interpreters back to the angel.

Like Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon before him, Bickerton looked to the day when the angel would bring back the plates, along with the Urim and Thummim. All three men expected to see the return of Jesus in their day, and each one assumed the sealed portion of the plates would be translated prior to the Second Coming. It would, among other things, solidify the status of the translator in helping prepare the way for the Millennium. Calling Bickerton a seer intensified the anticipation that he would be involved with additional ancient texts and that his transcriptions would unlock the history of the world, making plain the scriptural passages that had baffled theologians for centuries.¹¹

In the autumn of 1859, the faithful of Bickerton's denomination gathered at their new building in Green Oak, Pennsylvania, to dedicate it as their branch meeting house and as the churchwide headquarters. A year previous they had been told by James Wagoner what to expect at the dedication, Wagoner prophesying that it would be

11. Joseph Smith was promised knowledge "that has not been revealed since the world was until now; Which our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times, which their minds were pointed to by the angels, as held in reserve for the fulness of their glory; A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld" (D&C 121:26–32). After Smith's death, Sidney Rigdon wrote that God had given Smith "the keys of the mysteries of the things which had been sealed" until Smith had proven himself unworthy. "He [Smith] is gone and Christ has not come, and another [Rigdon] has taken his place as revelator" (Rigdon to Stephen Post, June 1, 1866, Post Collection, box 1, fd. 2; cited in Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 410–11). In 1891 Bickerton said he and his followers "felt by the Spirit of god, that it was the will of god, for us to have the Urim and Thummin" and that "god would Send Moroni to deliver the Sealed Records to Bro William Bickerton." "Cherokee District Conference," Jan. 17–20, 1891, 1–4.

like a day of Pentecost. Bickerton explained that the gates of Hell would shake before them on that day. Green Oak was the place God had chosen, and like King Solomon's temple on Mount Moriah, the Saints would finally have a tabernacle of their own in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains.

At 8 a.m. on October 2, the members met and prayed for two hours prior to the formal dedication at 10 a.m. Bickerton addressed the congregation and reminded them that God had sent out his apostles in pairs. In remembrance of that fact, he asked the elders to stand together in the aisle and file down to the front two by two, then asked the members to do the same. Then the whole congregation began to march around the building singing the hymn "How Firm a Foundation."¹² Part of the song reads:

How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
Who unto the Savior, who unto the Savior,
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled? ...

Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, upheld by my righteous,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.¹³

After parading through the chapel, they knelt before the altar and presented themselves to God in prayer. Their demonstration showed Bickerton their "willingness to leave [their] all to go forth in the name of the Lord."¹⁴ They had given of their means, and now they were placing their lives on the altar. Lingering a while in meditation, Henry Bake heard the Lord say, "I will reveal myself unto you my people, in a greater manner than has ever been made known unto this generation:

12. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 24.

13. Hastings, *Songs of Pilgrimage*, 524.

14. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 24.

for I will do greater wonders in this generation than what has ever been done. And I will let them know that I have raised up a man to lead forth my people, to the lost inheritances of my people, Israel[,] and that man is in your midst, Amen.”¹⁵

What followed was the four-day October conference beginning October 3, centered on how they could preach repentance to the entire country. Some apparently thought it would be imprudent to use the Book of Mormon. Bickerton and Charles Brown thought otherwise and drew on the biblical imagery of Ezekiel bringing together “two sticks” that were “written on” (scrolls) to make their point.¹⁶ The biblical context is striking because it occurs as part of a vision Ezekiel has of a valley of bones, and when God tells Ezekiel to speak, the bones rise up and become skeletons that are soon clothed with flesh. Ezekiel is commanded to call on the four winds to breathe life into the figures, but the corpses protest, saying “our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.” God knows otherwise. “Therefore prophesy,” he tells Ezekiel, “and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezek. 37). This, Bickerton and Brown believed, was a vision of what would literally happen during the Millennium.

“Moreover, thou son of man,” God continues to speak to Ezekiel, “take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.” Traditionally, this has been interpreted to mean the reunion of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. But Bickerton and Brown interpreted the scroll of Judah to be the Bible and the stick of Ephraim to be the Book of Mormon, so that when Ezekiel is told to put both sticks “in thine hand before their

15. “Book of Record,” 7.

16. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 25.

eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land," it meant to them, in part, that the American Indians would be rescued from oppression by Europeans and returned to their own lands in America.¹⁷

Several Native American tribes located in present-day Oklahoma during the antebellum period were there because they had been forced to move west from Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and elsewhere by the Indian Removal Act President Andrew Jackson signed in 1830. Jackson thought the Indians occupied land that should belong to the federal government, that under Indian stewardship the land was not meeting its economic potential.¹⁸ It is interesting that this act of Congress and publication of the Book of Mormon occurred within two months of each other. What remained for the prophet and seer to do was to send representatives to show the native people their destiny while the country was preoccupied with its own troubles. At the Green Oak conference, Henry Bake stood up and proposed, as the word of the Lord, that the Saints "humble yourselves in mighty prayer, and I will shower down my blessings as I have declared unto you." The members knelt down and prayed, and Charles Brown responded in the voice of Jesus saying that Bickerton "shall receive the word at my mouth, And he shall lead you forth, and your sound shall go forth to all the earth." Bickerton, Brown, and James Wagoner simultaneously stood up and spoke in tongues, interpreted by Bickerton to be confirmation that the Lord would "set my Angels to guard this House that ye have built unto me, and ye shall go from thence, unto all nations, Amen."¹⁹

17. On October 2, 1859, James Brown prophesied a similar message: "Verily, verily, thus saith the Lord, God, forasmuch as I have revealed unto this generation the Stick of Ephraim; thus saith the Lord, Join the two sticks together; and I will make them mighty to gather my people from the West and also to accomplish, my great purposes in these last days," see "Book of Record," 7.

18. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 347–52.

19. "Book of Record," 7–8.

The modest building that would be the church's headquarters had become a temple in their eyes. It didn't matter that it was a simple wood-frame structure, it had acquired the spiritual beauty of the temple described in the Old Testament. One member, M. Hunter, reported seeing ancient apostles and prophets walking to and fro in the meeting house.²⁰ These epiphanies occurred while the elders conducted business, such as on October 4 when Bickerton proposed that, considering how often Charles Brown and James Wagoner had joined him in uttering prophecies, they be named his counselors and their gifts given formal recognition. When Brown heard his name mentioned, he said the Holy Spirit "ran through him" and he knew it was of God.²¹ The appointments were probably no surprise to the congregation, as many agreed that they were the right men for the positions.

Others were reluctant to endorse this move, knowing that Brown and Wagoner had both defected from the church in the past. In 1855 Brown had attempted to set up his own church, and in October 1857, Wagoner had separated himself from Bickerton, but no details were given.²² Bickerton had long since forgiven them, but their offenses lingered with some of the other members. While considering these details, Hunter suddenly stood up and related a vision of Brown and Wagoner standing "in the midst of a multitude of people, surrounded with the glory of God." Seven men confirmed that they believed the vision, and Bickerton added that he saw a "cloud of Devine Glory descend into the house." For the moment, the matter seemed resolved.²³

Bickerton wanted, additionally, that Thomas Bickerton and George Barnes should be called as bishops. The New Testament explained that bishops were expected to visit the branches, offer advice, and settle disputes. It was not to be a rank in the priesthood, but an office one could fill if already ordained as an elder. The presidency may

20. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 25.

21. "Book of Record," 8.

22. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 8, 15.

23. *Ibid.*, 25–26.

have referenced the apostle Paul's advice that they "must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1Tim. 3:2–7), attributes found in abundance in Bickerton and Barnes. "I know that this is the true Church of the living God," Barnes would soon say, "and friends, if there is any among you that wants salvation, come this way and obey the commandments of God," he said in a pastoral voice.²⁴

Next the presidency decided to ordain Ralph Marsh as a patriarch. One might think of a father or grandfather with a large family when the word *patriarch* is used, or the Old Testament patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who blessed their sons and foretold their futures. It appears that the patriarchs in Bickerton's church bestowed blessings on members, as had been initiated by Joseph Smith in the 1830s in Kirtland, Ohio. This began when Joseph Smith Jr. and his father attended a session of the School of the Prophets. When the son was about to wash his father's feet, the son requested a "father's blessing," and Joseph Sr. told his son the Lord had promised him that he would "continue in his Priests office until Christ come."²⁵ The son was impressed by the spiritual potential of such a blessing and appointed his father patriarch to the whole church in order to give blessings to individuals outside the Smith family. It was under Brigham Young that patriarchs started assigning converts an Israelite identity, and the patrilineal office became institutionalized. Bickerton did not see the patriarch's role to initiate new members into a tribe of Israel, and he did not consider the office to be one that belonged in the Smith family; nor did he consider patriarchs to be evangelists.²⁶ Like Joseph Smith, he saw significance in connecting the church to its biblical foundation by giving comfort and direction to an individual and significance to the family unit.

24. Ibid.; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 1:29.

25. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 262.

26. In July 1887, Charles Brown, who was already a prophet, seer, and revelator, was ordained a patriarch. It was a special office held in addition to others. Unlike the Mormon Church, the office of patriarch was not equivalent to the office of evangelist. See J. S. Weeks, "A Letter," *St. John Sun*, Aug. 4, 1887.

As Bickerton, Brown, and Barnes laid their hands on Ralph Marsh, the latter saw a “great cloud of Glory” that was “like the Sun and [had] three links hanging from it,” representing the presidency’s reliance on the Holy Spirit. The three men then ordained various men to the offices of elder or evangelist. Even though the intention was to close the conference on that high note, people were so moved they believed there was more to experience and convinced the leaders to extend the conference longer.

In keeping with that decision, the elders drafted a statement and when everyone met the next day, October 5, they recited it together. It was a covenant to “give ourselves, our bodies, our souls, our time, our wives, and children, and all we possess ... [to] anything, that the Lord shall call us to.” The Lord answered their commitment through William Bacon, saying he was “well pleased with you for your diligence and faithfulness before me.” On the following day, Brown announced that each member would “receive a gift at the hands of the Lord[.] Therefore, exercise faith[,] for when every man [h]as received his proper gift I will send down the cloven tongues of fire and authority to go forth.” Bickerton interjected his approval and began enumerating what spiritual gift each member possessed. James Wagoner had the gift of discernment. Others possessed knowledge, wisdom, healing, the ability to work miracles, and several had the gift of speaking in tongues. In fact, as should be evident, Bickerton’s emphasis on spiritual gifts was a primary feature of the church’s theology and worship. This was partly due to the origin of the church in the Latter Day Saint movement and partly in keeping with the antebellum environment that included mysticism, the Holiness Movement (a remnant of the Second Great Awakening), personal perfection, public displays of spirituality, and anxiety about the future. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,” Bickerton would agree with the apostle Paul, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). The physical battles would be seen soon enough; for the time being, they were engaged in a spiritual battle

against temptation, trials, contention spawned by unseen demons—attempts to influence each individual heart.

On this last day of conference, October 6, Satan's influence was felt when a few of the members expressed doubts about the excessive spiritual manifestations. After the regular meetings, some of the members retired to Brother Cookston's house, where Bickerton recited another revelation. It was an unexpected way to quell discontent over too much revelation, but the Lord was unhappy and would not be confined. "For would I own and bless an unholy church?" the spirit protested. "Verily saith the Lord, ye are clean before me, and cursed be they that will say that my church is fallen." If anyone wanted to know what to expect in the future, follow the lead of Bickerton, they were told, and "ye shall see Visions, Dream Dreams, ye shall prophesy, there shall be Tongues, and Interpretations, and all other gifts, the dumb shall speak, the deaf shall hear, the lame shall walk, the sick shall be raised, and the poor shall hear the Gospel, Amen."²⁷

It was a strong answer. There was a feeling among the leadership that it was time to prune the gospel tree of members who doubted what their own eyes beheld, who dragged their heels, gossiped, and spread doubt and contention. God, Bickerton knew, would not allow a few to overthrow the work for which he had sacrificed so much. The spiritual gifts would continue. The poor would hear the message and believe it. What Jesus quoted in the temple from the prophet Isaiah was relevant to Bickerton: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). The church led by Bickerton would work the same miracles and preach the same gospel the Savior had.

The year 1859 stood out for Bickerton as the time he received more than nominal recognition as leader of the movement. Already for ten years, Charles Brown had affirmed Bickerton's prophetic gift, and the

27. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 25–27; "Book of Record," 9–10.

elders finally decided to recognize this by granting their spiritual leader an office bearing the title of prophet, even though there was not much precedent for this. In the early Mormon Church, a few individuals, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, for instance, were called “prophets, seers, and revelators.” They were nevertheless ordained to the high priesthood as elders or high priests. A rare instance in the Bible is when Elijah anointed his disciple, Elisha (1 Kings 19:16), to be a prophet. By creating a priesthood office to accommodate the visionary gift, the church symbolically indicated its acceptance of Bickerton’s revelations.

People were drawn to the charismatic nature of the church, even a few who had been part of the larger LDS movement and had concluded that their former leaders had lost their way. As Webster Wagoner said it on December 11, serving as an oracle for God’s message, “Hear ye the word of the Lord God of Hosts today. . . . I decreed that I would set up an Ensign, and raise up a Standard; that Ensign has been lifted, that Standard raised, and now I have called forth my servant William Bickerton to lead forth my people, and they shall go in and out and find pasture, and the world shall know that there is a God in Heaven; therefore, touch not mine anointed, Saith the Lord, Amen.”²⁸

The message drew upon the prophet Isaiah’s vision of a destroyed “land shadowing with wings,” which Sidney Rigdon understood to mean the geographical shape of the United States, Florida resembling a bird’s head and the northern and southern continents the outstretched wings.²⁹ This was the land where God would lift up an “ensign on the mountains” (Isa. 18:1–3). The location where the flag would be unfurled, Bickerton had come to believe, was the northern edge of the Allegheny Mountains. It was easy for him to see his followers as the ensign to the world the ancient Hebrew envisioned.³⁰ Isaiah described a time of peace, when “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the

28. “Book of Record,” 11.

29. John A. Forgeus to Samuel Forgeus, *Messenger and Advocate*, Pittsburgh, May 15, 1845.

30. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 1.

leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” It would be a time, according to Isaiah, when God would “gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:6–12). As Bickerton understood it, God would destroy the United States and replace it with a pastoral Eden.

On New Year’s Eve the Saints attended a watch meeting in Green Oak. The end times were so near, they might occur at any moment, especially on a day like New Year’s when God’s anger was sure to be piqued. If anything was possible, it in fact came to pass, although within the safety of the sanctuary as Brother Fielding experienced a vision of Bickerton standing beneath an arch, “on either side a serephim and a hand held out to him, and a voice, This is he—this is he.” They would be visited by angels, Fielding declared, and would become a “society of just men made perfect.”³¹ The significance of the six-winged seraphim, sometimes referred to as seraphs, was that the creatures served as caretakers of God’s throne (Isa. 6:1–3). Their recognition of Bickerton implied that he would have their protection, too, the same way these heavenly beings protected God’s throne. It also implied that the millennial reign was near. On New Year’s Day, Bickerton followed up with a divine promise that when they went out into the world, they would be “filled with the Holy Ghost and Fire,” a favorite theme of the prophet’s sermons.³²

At that, Brother Fielding received another vision, this time of angels sitting around a dining table that was filled with “all manner of delicacies.” “I tried twice to get at it,” he said, “but failed twice, but at length I gained the point[.] Then I beheld Angels[,] [and] those that sat around the table were united.” To Fielding, this indicated the future state of the church. Henry Bake agreed. “Verily thus saith the Lord God,” Bake intoned. “Angels shall come down and commission you to go forth, unto all nations, and the power of God shall rest upon you.” This prompted Benjamin Meadowcroft to relate that he and another elder had traveled

31. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 27.

32. “Book of Record,” 11.

a week ago to visit members in another town. Arriving back at midnight, thirsty from traveling, he grabbed a cup and filled it with water, not knowing his wife had been making soap and had filled the cup with lye. As he drank, he felt an abnormal icy feeling in his throat. He fell on his knees, realizing what he had drunk and assuming he would die. As he pled with God to spare him, he heard a voice say, "Fear not, for I am with thee," and he miraculously escaped any ill effect. The words of Jesus to his apostles came to mind, promising them that "if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:17–18).

Some of the members still doubted whether the revelations were real or contrived, which irritated Bickerton and his counselor, Charles Brown, who spoke in tongues, interpreted by William Bacon to say, "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ... deceive not yourselves neither think to deceive this people or I will set you as a monument[,] as Lots wife. Amen."³³ Of course, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt in the Bible (Gen. 19:1–26). The secretary neglected to record what effect this may have had on the scoffers. It would be interesting to know, since they could have seen it as a warning directed at Bickerton, rather than at them, or at anyone else who might embellish the revelations to tailor them to their preconceived expectation. Then again, the detractors would have had to believe the latest communication was from God in order to see it as a vindication of their concerns.

As the January conference continued the following day, sitting in the congregation, Jacob Stranger had not attended for some time and was asking to be readmitted into the church. Bickerton asked God and was told, as he related it to the congregation, "Verily thus saith the Lord ye are all fallible, and ye may transgress[,] therefore tremble and fear before me for I am God and this is my word[:] ye are all fallible therefore hear O my people and watch and pray for ye may fall, Amen." It was, once more, as if the message had been intended to give support to the critics as much as to answer how to treat a former apostate. It seemed to recall Joseph Smith challenging William McLellin to

33. Ibid., 12; Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 28.

write a better revelation than Smith, while acknowledging that his own had faults (D&C 62:4–9).³⁴ George Barnes added that “a man must first believe in the word of God before he can believe in the power of God,” which was a rebuke of the doubters.

To the question of how to receive someone back, a woman, H. Harrison, demonstrated that women too could channel Christ’s voice, delivering a message that “if any one be cut off by the Authority of this church they must be restored by repentance and Baptism; and in no other way can they be received, Amen.” Henry Bake felt inspired to clarify, thereby having the last word. “Thus saith the Lord,” he said, “one Baptism is sufficient inasmuch as ye live before me in righteousness. And if ye fall into sin and come and acknowledge it before me and my people ye shall be forgiven.” Then he added a condition for which rebaptism was necessary, if someone had committed a serious sin. “But if for those transgressions any has been separated from the Body of Christ, they must be restored by repentance and Baptism, Amen,” he said, thereby agreeing with Harrison.³⁵

Since it was determined that Stranger needed to be rebaptized, he must have fallen under the condition mentioned. The elders closed the meeting and led the congregation to the river, which became such an emotional moment that it prompted three other individuals, Ann Josephine Bake, Timothy Cadman, and Edward Stokes, to ask to be admitted into the congregation themselves. On that high note, the church launched a missionary outreach the next day, not yet to the world but to the larger region, almost touching Pittsburgh. “It is the will of the Lord,” Bickerton said to Charles Brown and George McNeal as he sent them to Limetown (Coal Bluff), while sending William Bacon to travel a few miles up the Youghiogheny River, and Webster Wagoner to travel to McKeesport where the Youghiogheny and Monongahela Rivers combine. Bickerton himself would travel sixty miles southwest to Wheeling, Virginia. “Every man must fill his

34. See Grandstaff, “Having More Learning Than Sense,” for an analysis of the episode.

35. “Book of Record,” 12–13; Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 28–29.

mission," Bickerton said, "or lose it." Before the conference ended, the men ordained Joseph Astin as a minister.³⁶

Bickerton was probably concerned about recent developments in Virginia and wanted to have someone visit Wheeling to check on the welfare and dedication of the congregants. In October the white abolitionist John Brown, with eighteen others, including five free blacks, had assaulted and captured the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Previously Brown had met with the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass at a quarry near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and informed him of his plan, which Douglas dismissed as a suicide mission that would "array the whole country against us." Brown assumed that the attack on the arsenal would spark a revolution among the slaves everywhere. To his dismay, as he and his men carried out their plan on October 16, 1859, no one came to their side. They were soon overrun by troops. Brown was hanged on December 2 on charges of treason, murder, and insurrection. An unexpected result, at least to Frederick Douglass, was that at the moment of Brown's death, churches across the country in the North rang their bells in his honor and town militias fired guns in salute, ministers extolled him as a saint, and thousands of people bowed their heads in a moment of silence. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that Brown would "make the gallows as glorious as the cross," which Henry David Thoreau seconded.³⁷

For Southerners, this support for an abolitionist was chilling and simply increased their distrust of Northerners, to the point that in early 1860 at Boggy Swamp, South Carolina, people evicted two school teachers even though "nothing definite is known of their abolitionist or insurrectionary sentiments," the newspaper reported. However, "being from the North, and, therefore, necessarily imbued with doctrines hostile to our institutions, their presence in this section has been obnoxious."³⁸ If the political climate gave Bickerton reason to worry, he

36. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 29.

37. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 205–10.

38. *Ibid.*, 212–13.

was reassured, prior to his departure, by Benjamin Meadowcroft saying that as Bickerton preached in the Southern state, “sinners shall fall at your feet.” James Wagoner seconded this statement with his own prophetic utterance, “Go ye forth[,] for I will be with you and my power shall attend you and souls shall be saved.”³⁹

Bickerton returned from Wheeling in March and reported that some in the congregation “tremble[d] and f[e]ll under the word[s]” he spoke. It may not have been an unexpected reaction to his revival-style oratory, but it was nevertheless fulfillment of the prophecy Meadowcroft had uttered before his leader’s departure. One can imagine, with people fainting and trembling, how forceful the prophet’s style of delivery must have been. He baptized nine new converts in Virginia. His message about the imminent collapse of the government had resonated.⁴⁰

In May the country’s political rupture grew more acute when the Republicans chose the dark-horse Abraham Lincoln to be their presidential candidate. On the surface he appeared moderate, his platform addressing tariffs and a proposed transcontinental railroad. But it was known that he opposed the expansion of slavery into the West, which in the past had been a conservative plank and now seemed incendiary. “Let the consequences be what they may,” a Georgia newspaper editorialized, “whether the Potomac is crimsoned in human gore, and Pennsylvania Avenue is paved ten fathoms deep with mangled bodies, ... the South will never submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.” The candidate responded that “the people of the South have too much of good sense, and good temper, to attempt the ruin of the government,” adding, “at least, so I hope and believe.”⁴¹ Kentucky statesman John J. Crittenden predicted that the South would “not submit to the consequences [of Lincoln’s election], and therefore, to avoid her fate, will secede from the Union.”⁴²

39. “Book of Record,” 13.

40. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 29.

41. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4:95.

42. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 230.

In mid-year 1860, a female church member, Charlotte Hibbs, was sweeping the meeting house when she saw “a woman all dressed in white [who] came in with a crown in her hand. In the crown was twelve stars. She laid the crown upon the stand and said ‘This crown belongs to this Church,’ then disappeared.”⁴³ It was July when she received this preview of the calling of twelve apostles, or perhaps a prediction of the church’s mission to the twelve tribes of Israel. The full meaning was not yet known, except that it was auspicious and bore resemblance to a vision of John the Revelator, in which “there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev. 12:1). The members were in good spirits three months later when they set out for Wheeling, Virginia, to hold a conference. It was awkward at first, when on October 8, Alexander Bickerton spoke in tongues, and the Wheeling members reacted with laughter. Trying to put a good face on it, or perhaps to record the members’ joy and surprise at witnessing spiritual manifestations, a member recorded that “such a glorious feeling was produced by the Holy Spirit that we was all forced to laugh and praise God.” Alexander’s foreign speech was accompanied by a vision he described of a “beautiful little tree” that was “fresh and healthy” and had been planted in a flower pot. Behind it was “a large old tree with all the branches dead.” Amanda Bickerton picked up this narrative and exclaimed that she saw a beautiful train of angels enter the sanctuary and march around with a flower pot in which a sapling had been planted, and that one of the angels placed the pot on the table in front of the congregation. Charlotte Hibbs stood and gave the interpretation in God’s voice, stating that the young church would minister to the “honest in heart” rather than to the established hierarchy.⁴⁴

It was reminiscent of the imagery the apostle Paul drew from the landscape of Asia Minor when he compared the Jewish church to an

43. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 29; William Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 13.

44. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 30; “Book of Record,” 14.

aging olive tree no longer bearing fruit and in need of being pruned. The best results were obtained when the branches of wild olive trees were grafted into it (Rom. 11). This was the message in both Alexander's and Amanda's visions. The small tree had been cared for by angels to replace the larger tree whose fruit had become bad. If the metaphor gave comfort to Bickerton's group, they were also aware that the apostle Peter had said that judgment would begin at home (1 Pet. 4:17–19). To know they were proceeding properly with the fresh young tree, a committee was formed to study the revelations Bickerton and others had received to be sure the members had not neglected any of the covenants they had made with God. This elicited another comment from the Lord through Alexander Bickerton, promising that those who remained faithful would "rise in the morning of the first Resurrection."⁴⁵ On the steamboat, while traveling home to Pennsylvania, the committee met on October 10 in a stateroom to pray for guidance and consider how to review the revelations.

When they were back in Pennsylvania, the committee met with Bickerton and he gave them his most startling command yet, advising them in the name of the Lord to remove from the written records any unfulfilled prophecies. "False predictions," he said, should not be retained, because they could make it appear that the prophet's statements had been equivocal or contrary to the divine purpose:

Verily verily thus saith the Lord God of Israel, unto you my people inasmuch As there are some false predictions in the church Book at Greenock, Blot them out, from among you And you shall know concerning the promises, And you shall know that there is a Prophet among you, and it shall no more be said your Prophet is weak, for you shall know there is a Prophet among you, And at his mouth you shall hear my word; and my blessings shall rest upon you, Amen.⁴⁶

Wanting to obey the instruction to destroy any false prophecies, the committee began reviewing the revelations and covenants, reporting

45. "Book of Record," 15.

46. Ibid.

in one instance, “We the committee do find a solemn covenant, made by us, the Church, at—Greenoak, October 5, 1859, [that] has never been fulfilled.” However, they decided the fault was not in the revelation, but in the membership for failing to carry it out. The membership was therefore “under the obligation of confessing before the Lord, our transgressions, that we may not be counted among the covenant breakers when we have to stand before the judgement seat of Christ.”⁴⁷ The church’s work proceeded through the last day of the October conference, at which William Cadman, a onetime skeptic who could not shake the feeling that his life had been protected from shipwreck and train wreck, was ordained an elder. At his baptism the previous year in December, he had come up out of the water realizing that at such a moment he could “appear before God, knowing that I had just done what he commanded me to do.” It was “the answer of a good conscience toward God” and trust in Christ that drove him to associate with the church. He wanted to assist others in their search for salvation. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had decided to buy a grocery store in the area and live among the Saints.⁴⁸

Abraham Lincoln won 40 percent of the vote in November. That was because it was a four-way race. In electoral votes he garnered 180, well beyond the 152 needed to win. The candidate in second place was Democrat John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, who netted only 72 electoral votes. North of the Mason–Dixon line, Lincoln earned 60 percent of the vote. The victor was careful to show humility so as not to inflame the national debate regarding slavery, but to no avail. The *Richmond Examiner* detected that the Republicans were “a party founded on the single sentiment . . . of hatred of African slavery.” Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams and grandson of John Adams, commented in his diary that with Lincoln’s win, “the great revolution” had begun. The country would “once and for all” throw out slavery.⁴⁹

47. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 30–31.

48. Cadman, *Faith and Doctrines*, 2:12–13; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 1:31.

49. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 231–33.

At another council meeting in December in West Elizabeth, William Bacon spoke about a vivid recent dream the church secretary thought was significant enough to mention in detail. "I though[t] in my dream that we were in a meeting," Bacon said. A voice explained some of the "elders present ... have the Gift of healing, [and] they are the ones [who should] attend" to the sick.

I was then shown the order of sitting each man in his place according to their callings before the Lord; The ordination of each calling was then shown unto me[.] There was a man called to be an Evangelist, I saw him sit in a chair[.] When the Prophet arose and said the Brethren will now attend to the laying on of Hands, according to their Order, I saw myself and five young men that had been Ordained for Evangelists, rise six in all, two on each side and two behind[.] They stood with their right Hands on the mans head so that his Head was completely covered[.] The Prophet then came and stood before the man and laid his two hands upon ours And the power of God came down so Powerful that the man shook as if he was sitting upon a Electrifying machine, in fact we all shook. I then was shown the Prophet standing looking, first at one Elder and then at an other to get them to come, As I have often seen him; showing the contrast of unity and order and otherwise.

Next Bacon received instruction on how to conduct ordinances. He was

told that Apostles should be ordained only by Apostles, Evangelists by the same order, and Elders by Elders, and all by six when that number is present; but in all cases the Prophets Hands was on the top and he pronounced the blessings; ... I was shown that while Evangelists or Elders could not ordain Apostles, yet the Prophet had the power and authority fully committed into his hands by the Great High Priest in Heaven to ordain any order according to Revelation or as it should be Revealed to him to do so.

To modern-day Christians, it may seem out of the ordinary for clergymen to be ordained by prophets. In the Old Testament the prophets were poets and critics, standing outside of the priestly orders. It is true that throughout Israel's history prophets anointed kings, sometimes

secretly and without any forewarning—appearing out of nowhere to pour oil on someone's head, for instance. There is that precedent, however (2 Kings 9:1–3; 1 Sam. 16:1–13).

Bacon's dream included instructions on preparing men for mission tours: "I was also shown the manner of sending men on Special Missions. It appears as though the two counsellors washed the feet or one washed and the other wiped them, the Prophet then Anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the three then laid their hands upon his Head." There was one more part to the dream, and it had to do with record keeping. Bacon "noticed [in] particular that every Gift or blessing pronounced upon any person's Head was recorded in [a] Book," and that this was how records should be kept in each congregation as well. In the end, Bacon's dream instructed the Saints on how to maintain order and prepare for the calamities expected to come. God, it appeared, wanted a righteous church, free of hypocrisy, before it took on the responsibility of preaching repentance to the nation.⁵⁰

Five hundred miles away, almost directly south of Pittsburgh, the governor and legislature of South Carolina called a special convention at the end of the year to determine how to proceed in the wake of Lincoln's election. On December 20 the delegates voted 169–0 to leave the United States. A Charleston journalist commented that there was "nothing in all the dark caves of human passion so cruel and deadly as the hatred the South Carolinians profess for the Yankees."⁵¹ That passion was equaled by the resentment felt in Pittsburgh, which became a hotbed of antagonism against the South. When Secretary of War John B. Floyd of Virginia ordered 124 cannons sent to two gulf forts in late December, their progress from the Allegheny Arsenal to what is now Fort Pitt Boulevard and the Monongahela Wharf was slowed by protestors through Christmas Eve. Ultimately only a few cannons reached the steamboat *Silver Wave* before the orders were retracted.⁵²

50. "Book of Record," 16–18; Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 32–33.

51. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 234.

52. Fox, *Pittsburgh during the American Civil War*, 1.

The Bickerton flock closed out the year by braving the cold water of the ever-present nearby river and baptized John Neish and George Profitt. Of the new elders who were ordained, one of them was the recently baptized Neish, and Jacob Stranger was reinstated to the office. Samuel Braddock and Benjamin Meadowcroft were ordained teachers. This all took place in a dramatic setting, for instance with George Barnes declaring, "Hear ye the word of the Lord. Hear ye the word of the Lord. Brother Neish is called to the office of Elder."⁵³ Another ordination occurred on New Year's Day. James Morgan was ordained a teacher, prior to Bickerton calling on members to testify to their beliefs. They should do so with confidence, he said, speaking for God: "It is my will that you all bare your testimonies to this work and that this is My Church and that ye be not as reeds shaken in the wind for if ye be as reeds shaken with every wind of Doctrine, ye can have no part or lot with me, saith the Lord God Almighty; therefore, bare your testimonies, and I will bless you saith the Lord God of Hosts."⁵⁴

As Americans spent the holiday season gearing for war, the Christian message of peace was forgotten, both sides calling for an end to tyranny. The definition of tyranny differed depending on the region. There is no indication of fear in Bickerton's writings or in the minutes of the meetings, but that does not mean he or the church felt at ease. In 1860 Bickerton's wife, Dorothy, had given birth to their last daughter, Florence, and they faced the prospect of raising five girls and a son in wartime. As both a father and a minister, as someone about to turn forty-six in January, Bickerton faced the future with paternal instincts, devotion to his faith, and the experience of fifteen years since he preached his first sermon.

There may have been some of his followers and acquaintances among the 10,000 people in front of the Monongahela House in Pittsburgh in February when Lincoln stayed there. People arrived in the rain from all over the surrounding countryside to get a glimpse of him.

53. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 35.

54. *Ibid.*, 36.

Lincoln arrived late because of the storm, but stood on the balcony to “address the citizens of Pennsylvania, briefly, this evening, on what is properly styled their peculiar interest,” he said, subtly referencing their Christmas Eve protest. “I have a great regard for Allegheny County,” he declared. “It is ‘the banner county of the Union,’ and rolled up an immense majority for what I, at least, consider a good cause. By a mere accident, and not through any merit of mine, it happened that I was the representative of that cause, and I acknowledge with all sincerity the high honor you have conferred on me.” The crowd was overjoyed to hear him condone what the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* had described as “interposing bodies of citizens of the U.S. before the timber wheels [of the approaching canon carriages].” “Three cheers for Honest Abe!” shouted someone in the crowd. The people pleaded for him to speak longer, but he said he had promised to deliver his official address the next day.

On February 15 he spoke to another immense crowd, probably many of whom had seen him the night before, once more standing on the balcony overlooking the waterfront. “The condition of the country, fellow-citizens, is an extraordinary one,” he declared, “and fills the mind of every patriot with anxiety and solicitude.” He pointed over the river in the direction of Virginia. “Notwithstanding the troubles across the river,” he said, “there is no real crisis, springing from anything in the government itself. In plain words, there is really no crisis except an artificial one!” “If the great American people will only keep their temper, on both sides of the line,” he said, “the troubles will come to an end, and the question which now distracts the country will be settled.” At least publicly Lincoln displayed hope that the secessionist fervor would calm down even though in January Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana followed South Carolina out of the Union, followed by Texas on February 1. He declined to say more, confessing that “to touch upon it all would involve an elaborate discussion of a great many questions and circumstances and would perhaps unnecessarily commit me upon matters which have not yet fully developed themselves.” The audience was pleased by that. Some

shouted, "Good." Others cried, "That's right!" Time would tell, he knew, as did the audience.⁵⁵

In his inaugural address, Lincoln showed a pacific bent. "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists," he told the country. "I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." He assured the country he meant what he said. "Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations and had never recanted them." He would not press the issue "unless it be forced upon the national authority," he said.⁵⁶ The next day he learned of the movement of Major Robert Anderson and his troops to the security of Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay because they feared attack and were running low on supplies. A few days later, delegates from seven Southern states met in Montgomery, Alabama, and adopted the Constitution of the Confederate States of America. They had previously ratified the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they said, and had just as much right now to reject it.⁵⁷

It was with this backdrop that Bickerton and the other elders met for the April conference at which men from both sides of the Ohio River gathered. "It was found to be the will of God," the secretary wrote, "that we salute one another with a kiss of Charity." That was the greeting recommended by the apostle Paul in the New Testament (2 Cor. 13:11–12). "A most glorious time we had saluting the brethren," the secretary added. "Likewise we found it to be the Will of God, that the Brethren in this place wash the feet of the brethren that came from a distance," meaning in particular those who had arrived from Wheeling, Virginia. When Benjamin Meadowcroft knelt down to wash the feet of one of his Southern brethren, "the love of God flowed freely," the secretary recorded, and again "the brethren rose, one after another

55. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4:208–11; Fox, *Pittsburgh during the American Civil War*, 1.

56. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4:250–54.

57. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 246.

and saluted the [visiting] brethren with a Holy Kiss of Charity.”⁵⁸ Cultural and political differences would not stop them from worshipping together, demonstrating what Lincoln had in mind for the country when he said that “though passion may have strained[,] it must not break our bonds of affection.”⁵⁹ At least for now, the church was united.

The same could not be said of the country. That same day, Lincoln sent a message to the governor of South Carolina alerting him that Fort Sumter would be resupplied, although with non-lethal provisions, and he hoped this could be done without interference. Confederate President Jefferson Davis found an opportunity to dramatize the severing of their alliance with the North, and so he ordered General P.G.T. Beauregard to attack before help could arrive. The general opened fire on April 12, and Anderson and his men endured thirty-nine hours of bombardment by 4,000 shells that destroyed part of the fort and set the interior on fire before they surrendered. Lincoln responded by calling out 75,000 state militia to put down the insurrection that was obviously “too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings.” The conflict everyone feared had begun.⁶⁰

Bickerton knew it would come to this, having relied on Joseph Smith’s prophecy that the conflict would begin in South Carolina.⁶¹ He found support for this in the Book of Mormon where the resurrected Jesus warned the gentiles that “it shall come to pass in that day ... that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots. And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strongholds ... And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee; so will I destroy thy cities” (3 Ne. 21:14–18). The prophet of Pennsylvania felt some urgency now to finish organizing the church the

58. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 36.

59. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4:261. The new president famously went on to say that “the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

60. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 272–74.

61. *A Prophecy by Joseph Smith*, 1; D&C 87.

way Jesus established it some 2,000 years earlier. For instance, Jesus had called twelve apostles and commissioned them to “teach all nations ... to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). Some of Bickerton’s followers had already asked why they had not ordained apostles. Another issue was how they would fund twelve men, if their calling was to preach abroad—and whether they should go to the Middle East and Mediterranean as in the New Testament or westward to Indian Territory. Should they preach to the gentiles or only to the House of Israel? “But if they [gentiles] will repent,” Jesus said in the Book of Mormon, “and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob [Native Americans], unto whom I have given this land [America] for their inheritance” (3 Ne. 21:22). Both the gentiles and the Indians needed to hear the urgent message, he concluded. In the near future, the Choice Seer named Joseph would make himself known to the church and presumably would be the one to convince the Indians that they were one of the lost tribes of Israel. Together, the Choice Seer and William Bickerton would lead the Saints to Zion. It was a glorious plan, and time was running out.⁶²

62. This idea that time was running short was emphasized by Bickerton on January 2, 1861. He shared with the members a revelation he had earlier that morning. “I saw the sun setting with the moon beneath it and underneath them was a watch set,” he said, “and the hour of it was a little over half past eleven,” see Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 1:30–31.

SEVEN

ORGANIZATION

1861–62

“[H]ear ye the word of the Lord, O ye Twelve, whom I have chosen and ordained, I commit unto [you] the Keys of the Kingdom, and no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, until you have finished your work. I shall make you as a bow—and my word shall go from you as an arrow, and many shall cry out ‘what shall we do?’”

—revelation, Charles Brown, July 8, 1862

Bickerton and his followers believed they were favored by God to be acting out the ancient prophecies, in some ways like Jesus mentioned to his disciples, “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matt. 13:17). The remnant of Israel would soon “rend that veil of unbelief,” is how the Book of Mormon described the last days (Ether 4:15). Most Christians, and the Bickertonites alike, assumed the Jewish people would convert to Christianity after the final battle of Armageddon, when Jesus would descend from the sky to the Mount of Olives, as the Prophet Zechariah foretold, and convince the stunned onlookers that he had been crucified for their sakes. “What are these wounds in thine hands?” they would ask him. After they accepted him as the son of God, Christ would deliver them from their enemies (Zech. 13:6; 14).

The Civil War was the conflict Latter Day Saints believed would lead to Armageddon. “With the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants

of the earth shall mourn,” Joseph Smith said, “and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations.” What this meant to Bickerton was that there was a need to hurry the church’s preparations. If the gentiles were to be saved, now was their chance (D&C 87:6; 3 Ne. 21–22). What Green Oak offered the world was not only spiritual salvation but earthly redemption during the final drama. Then the wolf would lie down with the lamb through the Messiah’s thousand-year reign.

Four days after the surrender of Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 17, 1861, another Southern state, Virginia, seceded from the U.S. and joined the Confederacy. The state had been central in the Revolutionary period in producing such leaders as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, and it had a large population and industrial capacity. Spurred by the example of Virginia, three more states left the Union in the following weeks: Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Another result of Virginia’s exit was its contribution to the Confederate leadership of Robert E. Lee, a full colonel in the US Army and graduate of West Point, with experience in the Mexican–American War. President Lincoln offered him the field command of the US forces on April 18, the same day Lee heard of Virginia’s secession. “I cannot raise my hand against my birthplace,” he decided, opting rather on April 23 to accept the position of commander-in-chief of Virginia’s military forces. Three weeks later he became a brigadier general. His dilemma illustrates what many Americans went through. For instance, US General-in-chief Winfield Scott was from Virginia. If everything seemed muddled, as the war progressed the goals of the Confederacy and the Union changed so much that it was difficult for either side to remember what the original point was.

Bickerton’s followers, like other Americans, experienced some dissonance due to the religiosity of the Southern leaders and agreed with

General Lee's statement of May 1861, "I foresee that the country will have to pass through a terrible ordeal, a necessary expiation perhaps for our national sins," the very thing Bickerton had been preaching and would be heartily endorsed by members in Wheeling, Virginia, if not in Green Oak, Pennsylvania.¹ Sixty miles upriver from Wheeling, at the head of the Ohio River, and only twenty miles from Green Oak, Pittsburgh was alive with preparations for the Union side as both a manufacturing center and staging ground. It would have been difficult to escape the impact of the state Committee on Troops and Provisions accepting and outfitting twenty-six companies of volunteers beginning April 26. A newspaper publisher, George H. Thurston, described Pittsburgh in the 1860s:

For quite the entire period of the war, Pittsburgh was literally a camp and an arsenal. Her foundries, her rolling mills, her tanneries, her harness factories, her clothing manufactories, her [places of] production of shot and shell ... infantry and cavalry accoutrements. ... But few hours of the day or night were without the passage of guns or troops, or was the roll of the drum silent. ... Her streets were literally a war path.²

Historian Leland Baldwin adds context: "The war years in Pittsburgh were a time of frenzied money-making and unselfish devotion; of high prices and high rents offset by high wages; of mass meetings in the town hall being addressed by fat stay-at-homes and [the] passing [of] grandiloquent resolutions." The city offered incentives of up to \$1,000 to enlist for periods of one month to three years.³ It was a day of "wars and rumors of wars" and "great pollutions upon the face of the earth," just as the Book of Mormon said (Morm. 8:30–31). Before long the appeal of the drums was heard in Green Oak and West Elizabeth, responded to by William Bacon, for one, who enlisted in

1. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 280–81.

2. Thurston, *Pittsburgh and Allegheny*, 26.

3. Fox, *Pittsburgh during the American Civil War*, 3–5.

September and would remain in the service three years until he contracted dysentery and was discharged.⁴

For a while it seemed that every detail of Joseph Smith's prophecy was being fulfilled: "The Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves" (D&C 87:3). Britain relied on the South for cotton to supply its textile factories. "What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years?" the South Carolina politician James Hammond asked in 1858. "England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her."⁵ "If those miserable Yankees try to blockade us," the *London Times* quoted a Charleston merchant, he had no doubt England would "send their ships to the bottom" of the ocean. The predicted blockade elicited a remark from Britain's prime minister, Viscount Palmerston, who wrote to the foreign minister, John Russell, in October 1861 that "we cannot allow some millions of our [factory workers] to perish to please the Northern States." On the other hand, at another time Palmerston quoted the couplet that "they who in quarrels interpose / will often get a bloody nose." Supplies began to dwindle in Europe, and that made the price of cotton rise to the point that it was more attractive to farmers in Egypt and India, who were more than happy to plant more of the crop to meet the demand.⁶

In the spring of 1861, people in the thirty-five western counties of Virginia were sufficiently discontent with the state's betrayal of the country that they sent representatives to a conference in Wheeling to discuss their future. They had little in common with the coastal side of the state. The mountainous terrain was unsuited for plantation crops, and the culture was different. The state legislature preferred the eastern

4. Stevenson, "History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers." He would recover his health and live another forty-four years, dying on Christmas 1908 in McKeesport, a few miles north of Green Oak (Greenock).

5. U.S. Senate, Mar. 4, 1858, in *Congressional Globe* (Washington DC: 1859), 35th Congress, 1st session, appendix p. 70.

6. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 383–86.

lowlands, indicated by the fact that slaves were taxed at a third their market value, while all other property was valued at full price. The need in the West for infrastructure was barely understood in the East. During the recent meetings on secession, twenty-six of thirty-one delegates from northwest Virginia voted against. Now the delegates in the mountains wanted to rejoin the Union. The problem was that the US Constitution required a seceding region within an existing state to receive the blessing of that state's legislature. The delegates in Wheeling well knew that the Confederate government in Richmond would not consent to their separation.

The solution was to declare the existing state government void and appoint alternative officials, as was done on June 20. When news of this reached Lincoln, he extended official recognition, and the new legislature elected two new US senators and three congressmen, all of whom soon took their seats in Washington. By the time the legislature had completed these adjustments, the Union army had invaded western Virginia and defeated a small Confederate force, which gave teeth to the local determination to stand with the Union. West Virginia would be officially admitted to the United States on June 20, 1863.⁷

Even though Bickerton was silent on this development, it must have been a relief to see the nearby national border erased. It was the parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross over, the way it made contact with the Wheeling branch possible. During the run-up to these developments, the Saints were gathered in the house of Richard Bickerton, the prophet's nephew, on July 6 when Charlotte Hibbs saw a heavenly hand holding two crowns that were placed next to William Bickerton and Charles Brown, between whom stood a tree from the spirit world. The two men were illuminated by a pillar of light. While this was occurring, a Sister Davis was approaching the house and saw the same pillar of light, without having communicated with Hibbs or others in the house. As she related this to the congregation, people marveled that she could describe part of the same

7. Ibid., 298–99.

vision, paralleling Isaiah's prophecy, "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, ... thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. 62:1–3). As the visions probably were interpreted, the tree represented the House of Israel, a genealogical tree they believed they, as gentiles, were grafted into.

John Dixon shared his own recent vision of "a very large fish" that had "a basket in its mouth. Then I saw Bro Arthur Bickerton standing by," he said, "and [Bickerton] took the basket. His wife Margaret asked what is in the basket? He then took from the basket a book and said, It is a book for John Dixon." Praying to understand what this meant, he was answered by the Lord's voice to his mind: "I have heard thy prayers, My servant John[,] and I have seen thy tears, that thou art sincere, therefore surely thou shalt stand between my people and me. I will give thee my word and thou shalt speak it faithfully, and I will bless thee, both in temporal and spiritual things." At that, Dixon must have remembered that in the Bible Jesus told Peter he would make him a "fisher of men" (Matt. 4:18). The basket was probably a lure to attract the fish. When he had completed his rehearsal of what he had seen, the elders concluded that it meant God had called him to the priesthood.⁸

Dixon had another message to deliver. The church needed to be purged of the unworthy. As he lay in bed, the Lord said to him one night, "These are my people, but there are some among them, who ... will not believe my word that I reveal to my servants and handmaids, therefore, thus saith the Lord, I will cause you to cut them off." Bickerton agreed, having endured the brunt of the hostility from members who suspected him of inventing revelations. "Cursed be they that will say that my church is fallen," he declared in God's voice back in 1859. "Cursed be every one, that shall attempt to upset, or overthrow, or destroy my work."⁹

Sister Davis had also experienced a confirmation of Dixon's spirit

8. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 37–38.

9. Ibid.; "Book of Record," 10.

dictation. In a dream, she had seen Charles Cowan carrying a child he said was dead, but who on investigation was still alive. This could only mean that "Charles Cowan has denied the Authority of this church and said that this church was dead, and likewise, that he is not one of us."¹⁰ This must have sent shock waves through the conference because Cowan was an ardent and gifted minister who had often demonstrated spiritual gifts. In October 1858 he, Bickerton, and Charles Brown had sung together in an unknown language.¹¹ There is no record of Cowan's response, so it is unknown whether he challenged this. Strange as it would seem for him suddenly to denounce the church, the seeds of doubt had spread through the membership. George Barnes started to question whether they should have ever separated themselves from the Utah church. They had lacked "the vocal voice of the Lord" in coming to that decision, he argued.¹²

This opened a wound in Bickerton's heart. In his mind, there had been no question whether to leave Brigham Young's teachings and practice of polygamy. Why had some of the members dragged their feet on that point? This could not have come at a worse time, since Young, also believing the Civil War had apocalyptic significance, had recently sent missionaries out to gather in the members who were still in the Midwest and East. "All Elders should understand that after baptism comes the gathering," Young wrote to two of his apostles, "and that everything which in the least impedes the gathering tends directly to hinder the great work in which we are engaged." Men throughout Utah Territory were asked to donate wagons and oxen to take east for the immigration the following year, to return with not only immigrants, but also needed merchandise and machinery in case it became unavailable in the future.¹³ The missionaries arrived in Western Pennsylvania and encountered Bickerton's group, some of whom converted and decided

10. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 37.

11. *Ibid.*, 19.

12. *Ibid.*, 37.

13. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 313.

to move west and avoid the war. This infuriated Bickerton. "The Utah people sent missionaries out and [s]cared a good many away to Salt Lake City," he fumed.¹⁴

Throughout the remainder of the 1860s, Young's renewed effort would bring in two or three thousand immigrants each year for a kind of hibernation, away from the waking nightmare that was developing in the East.¹⁵ In that context, Barnes's doubts posed a real threat, and the Utah Mormons held a local conference a half mile away at the same time Bickerton was trying to bolster his followers against this new threat. This may explain the stimulus for the Davis and Dixon revelations. Bickerton offered a final word on the matter when he said the Lord told him "that He accepted this Church as the Church of Alma."¹⁶ Drawn from a story in the Book of Mormon, it was a metaphor about a soldier, Zeniff, who led some Nephite settlers into enemy territory in the south and negotiated with their king to allow them to settle in the region. Zeniff became a king, succeeded by a man named Noah, who had multiple wives and concubines. "And he did cause his people to commit sin," the Book of Mormon reads, "and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness." The people were taxed heavily for the construction of "elegant and spacious buildings" (Mosiah 11:2–14). Into this milieu stepped a prophet named Abinadi who promised that the people would be delivered into the hands of their Lamanite enemies if they did not repent. A priest named Alma responded to this and eventually led a church of believers in Christ that grew to encompass the entire Nephite civilization.

In this comparison, Joseph Smith was Zeniff, in that his followers settled in the midst of their enemies. Brigham Young was Noah, and Bickerton was Alma. Why did people not recognize this similarity? he wondered. Paraphrasing the apostle Peter, Bickerton said the Utah

14. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2.

15. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 313.

16. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 2.

clan “have eyes full of adultery and cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls, and have exercised their hearts with covetous practices.” Warming even more to this topic, he continued to say the settlers of the Great Basin were “cursed children who have forgotten the right way and are gone astray ... for it had been better for [them] not to have known the way of righteousness than after they had known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” Although Bickerton had never personally met Young, he believed he and the Western prophet were engaged in an epic battle exactly like Alma and Noah. He referenced this when he wrote that “in the confusion which resulted from Joseph Smith’s death, the Lord moved on William Bickerton to [gather] ... a body of people ... even as in the day of Alma.”¹⁷

The words of Abinadi were as clear in Bickerton’s ears as the cannon fire of the Civil War. “It shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be ... slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh,” the Nephite doomsayer had preached (Mosiah 12:2). Bickerton believed his church would be the last haven for the pure in heart, including for Utah Mormons, if only they could see “the stupendous work of the latter days” occurring in his church. Sometimes he saw it in terms of David and Goliath, his membership of 500 pitted against the mammoth Utah church with over 20,000 members. The battle would decide the ultimate leader of God’s people, he thought.¹⁸

The sins of the desert Saints encompassed more than taking multiple wives. Rogue Mormons massacred an immigrant train in the southern part of the territory, and Bickerton was not shy about enumerating the horror of the event. President James Buchanan urged the Utah attorney general in 1859 to find and prosecute those responsible for the slaughter that occurred two years past in September 1857. The victims were members of the Baker–Fancher party, mostly from

17. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 3, 17; Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 2.

18. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 3–4; Mancini, “List of Branches”; Bushman and Bushman, *Building the Kingdom*, 46.

Arkansas, and they had had the misfortune of traveling through the territory to California during the conflict known as the Utah War. Mormons were at that time isolated from the rest of the country and fearful of outsiders. Buchanan had sent a military force to Utah to curb its disloyalty to the federal government.¹⁹

And so it happened that, with the approach of the US Army, Mormons were conserving supplies and unwilling to sell goods to the members of the Baker–Fancher wagon train on its way to California. Some immigrants may have responded by voicing support for the incoming troops. In any case, local Mormon leaders Isaac C. Haight and John D. Lee mobilized the regional militia to back up a raid by Paiute Indians that would retaliate by stealing some cattle, horses, and gold currency. The raid went badly, and Mormons who were supposed to provide unseen support, seeing the Indians were outgunned by the marksmen among the travelers, followed up with a raid of their own. The party learned the identity of their attackers, leading Haight to wonder what would happen if the travelers told the California newspapers and federal officials what had occurred. A decision was made to eliminate the immigrants, 120 men, women, and young people, sparing only a few of the youngest children who were taken in by nearby families.²⁰

Prior to the attorney general's investigation of the massacre, federal judge John J. Cradlebaugh had begun his own proceeding in Provo in March 1859. US soldiers had found "women's hair ... hung to the sage-brushes" at Mountain Meadows and reported "parts of little children's dresses and of female costume [that] dangled from the shrubbery. ... For at least a mile in the direction of the road, by 2 miles east and west, there gleamed, bleached white by the weather, the skulls and other bones of those who had suffered."²¹ Perhaps the militiamen who had participated in the raid thought this neglected evidence would look

19. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 308.

20. Bowman, *Mormon People*, 120–23. See also Walker et al., *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.

21. Bowman, 120.

like the remains of an Indian attack. As the investigation proceeded, Cradlebaugh ordered the arrest of three local church leaders, but it was soon after this that President Buchanan contacted the attorney general, and Cradlebaugh's investigation was canceled. The new inquiry made little headway beyond where Cradlebaugh had left off.

Through all of this, Young acted defensively, complaining about federal interference when, for instance, a military escort transported children of the Baker–Fancher party to their relatives in the East. In May 1861, Young visited Mountain Meadows and saw the cairn in which a wooden cross was planted, on which the soldiers had written from the New Testament, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” Young offered his own interpretation of what God had done: “Vengeance is mine and I have taken a little,” he said, indicating how little sympathy he felt for the victims. Nor did he blame the local Mormons who had committed the crime, believing that they and the rest of the Mormons had suffered enough from the federal government.²²

Bickerton, on the other hand, was appalled, and had a theory of his own about what had occurred. “I had a chance to get acquainted with some of the Danite Band,” he said in reference to the Mormon guerrillas who had been active during the Mormon War in Missouri in 1838. “The mountain meadow massacre was committed by, or through these false teachers of my acquaintance, as the Elders from that time, on down to the present, must obey the orders of their superior officers.”²³ The reason the Danites were formed was because some prominent Mormons had defected and had information that would be damaging to the church. Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon scribe, and David and John Whitmer, two of the individuals who signed statements saying they had seen the gold plates, were excommunicated for bringing accusations against other church members, Cowdery having accused Joseph Smith of committing adultery. All three had allegedly initiated “vexatious lawsuits.” Still loyal to

22. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 309.

23. Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 1–2.

Smith, Sidney Rigdon preached against the dissenters in a fiery address known as the Salt Sermon, quoting the Savior's statement, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."²⁴ Eighty-three Mormons, including Smith's brother Hyrum, followed up with a letter warning Cowdery, the Whitmers, and others to "depart with your families peaceably" within three days or face "a more fatal calamity." The vigilantes were then formed by Sampson Avard to nudge the dissenters out of the area and frighten them from speaking against the church.²⁵

For decades after Mountain Meadows, rumors had circulated that Brigham Young still operated a group of Danites. Bickerton put two and two together based on what he knew of Missouri, concluding that the atrocity must have been conducted on orders from the top. This was not, in fact, a Danite conspiracy, but whatever the behind-the-scenes story was, the publicity surrounding the failed attempt to bring the guilty parties to justice, as interpreted by Bickerton, may have helped quash some budding interest among his members in rejoining the Utah denomination, at least for the time being. At the July 9, 1861, meeting, he directed the members' attention toward something he considered more essential and for which the time had finally come, which was the formation of a Quorum of Twelve Apostles, one of the pillars in the architecture of the church organization. After conferring with the elders, the first seven apostles were named: George Barnes, Charles Brown, Arthur Bickerton, Joseph Astin, Thomas Bickerton, William Bacon, and James Brown. The following day five more were added to the list: Andrew Rattray, Alexander Bickerton, Cummings Cherry, Benjamin Meadowcroft, and John Neish. Confident that these were the right choices, the elders nevertheless wanted to delay the ordinations, perhaps to give them more time to meditate and receive confirmation of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

24. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 350; Matt. 5:13.

25. Turner, *Brigham Young*, 56–57.

26. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 38.

When an August 3 council meeting opened, the members of the priesthood felt good about their original choices but still wanted more time to think about it, once more probably feeling the need for a stronger spiritual confirmation. On the other hand, they were ready to proceed with the ordination of six evangelists, announced by Bickerton as John Ashton, John Bickerton, William Cadman, Joseph Knox, James Nichols, and John Stevenson. Later in the meeting, Frederick Abling, John Dixon, and Morgan Thomas were added to the evangelists and John Tilford to the elders.²⁷

Bickerton returned to the book of Isaiah in October to see what more the prophet had said would occur in the last days. “Go, ye swift messengers,” Isaiah penned in his poetic voice, “to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning” (Isa. 18:2). Sidney Rigdon had previously established that the land in the shape of a bird was the United States, so it was a small step for Bickerton to interpret “a nation peeled” to imply the current division between North and South. Even some in the North began to wonder if they were worthy of victory, or if they were so terribly unfit “for empire,” as the *Richmond Whig* editorialized, as demonstrated by the devastating defeat at Bull Run in Virginia that July when nearly 500 Union soldiers were killed. A Georgian politician, Thomas Cobb, thought it was “one of the decisive battles of the world.” Lincoln immediately signed a bill enlisting 500,000 more men for a three-year term, and three days later he increased the number to a million.²⁸ The Union was defeated again in August at Wilson’s Creek in Missouri, resulting in US General John C. Frémont being removed from command. That battle left half of Missouri under the control of the Confederacy, and hundreds of lives had been lost.²⁹ Bickerton claimed to know why. It was federalism. Each state considered itself sovereign, and that idea had split the United States into what Isaiah had seen as the “scattered” pieces of the Union.

27. Ibid., 38–39.

28. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 347–48.

29. Piston and Hatcher, *Wilson’s Creek*, 337–38.

There would be more devastation, Bickerton knew from the scriptures. "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, [the Lord] shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them." So it was when two hundred miles away at the Battle of Leesburg, Union forces suffered losses at a ratio of seven to one. At the conclusion of the war, Bickerton believed, a new banner would be unfurled. What kind of flag would it be? "See ye, when [the Lord] lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye" (Isa. 18:3). It would be the banner raised in the Allegheny Mountains, the church secretary noting that after Bickerton finished preaching on this and "the evil pronounced against" the United States, "the blessings of God accompanied the whole of the afternoon."³⁰

This sermon had a great effect on the congregation. With such drama occurring all around, it would be hard not to see themselves as the people foretold who would endure calamities at the end times. The thought was as terrifying as it was awe-inspiring. Despite the battles being fought on all sides, they decided it was time to begin preaching in urban centers. Maybe because they were less likely to encounter the clash of troops in the cities, or maybe because they felt they had rehearsed their message to small gatherings and were ready to confront larger crowds. Whatever the case, John Neish and Cummings Cherry were sent to Penn Station (Union Station) in the heart of Pittsburgh; John Stevenson and Arthur Bickerton were to go to Allegheny City, a busy railroad juncture; while Joseph Astin and Alexander Bickerton would visit the ferry crossing in Wheeling, Virginia. At the afternoon session, John Ashton walked around the room speaking in tongues, translated by another brother as, "Go ye into the highways and byways and compel them to come in."

30. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 39.

This met the approval of the secretary. “We found it to be the will of the Lord,” he wrote, “that we preach the gospel in every place, whether it be on the railroads or on the Steamboats.”³¹

The church’s history for the year 1862 began with a meeting on January 2 in West Elizabeth, where Charlotte Hibbs interpreted for Joseph Astin’s gift of tongues, saying the gospel would be taken “unto every kindred tongues and people.” How could such a small church accomplish such a thing? they must have wondered. Maybe that was part of the miracle that would attract the notice of the world, when the Lord demonstrated that “I am able to do mine own work” (2 Ne. 27:21). Feeling overwhelmed by the realization, Bickerton brought out a basin and water and knelt down to wash the feet of twenty-eight men, followed by a special blessing on each one. It was evident that these men were expected to usher in one of the great events in human history, the gathering prior to the Second Coming.

Next he turned his attention to the church records. Often in the early years of the movement, a secretary was randomly selected before a meeting to take notes, and the records were inconsistent. He felt it was time to bring some order to the minutes, in light of the grand events taking place. They therefore “set apart, by the laying on of hands,” two men, Joseph Astin and James Brown, and commissioned them to “keep a true and faithful record” of what they observed.³²

Three days later, William Bacon decided he was not up to the challenge of a wartime mission assignment after all and withdrew his name from consideration as an apostle. He had enlisted in the army, Bickerton told the members. Since 1852, Bacon had been one of the most reliable, gifted, and competent leaders of the church, his spiritual utterance having confirmed Bickerton’s calling to the office of a prophet. What was his motivation in joining the Union army? Scholars have written that the main stimulus behind enlistment was a fear for the country’s future. “We were born and bred under the stars and

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 40–41.

stripes,” an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Post* voiced the prevailing sentiment on April 15, 1861. The country had been a nurturing parent and the South was seen as a misbehaving sibling, threatening the harmony and success of the family. Or as Abraham Lincoln said to Congress on July 4, 1861: “Our popular government has often been called an experiment. Two points in it, our people have already settled—the successful establishing, and the successful administering of it. One still remains—its successful maintenance against a formidable internal attempt to overthrow it.” This involved some irony: by compelling the South to conform, the same air of freedom and self-determination the country was known for would be preserved. Even so, it was a powerful idea.³³

There were other reasons. Some had a romantic view of war involving the glamour and pomp of the uniforms and parades and the testing of one’s courage. For some church members, patriotism could have been fused with millennial theory.³⁴ More mature individuals such as William Bacon may have worried about the US Constitution’s protection of religious freedom, without which Bickerton would be unable to preach and the zionic community would not be possible. A New Jersey soldier expressed a similar concern that “our glorious institutions are likely to be destroyed. We will be held responsible before God if we don’t do our part in helping to transmit this boon of civil & religious liberty down to succeeding generations.”³⁵ Others were motivated by the example of John Brown and the view of the war as a righteous endeavor, although at first the North was fighting to preserve a Constitution that had slavery written into it. Overall, Bacon’s enlistment,

33. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 308–09.

34. See, for instance, the promise in the Book of Mormon that the American colonists would be “delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Ne. 13:16–19). The resurrected Jesus said, “For it is wisdom in the Father that they [European immigrants] should be established in this land [America], and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things [gospel] might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed [Indians], that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel” (3 Ne. 21:4).

35. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 309.

although it cost him his position as an apostle, could have fulfilled a deep-seated patriotism fused with his spiritual convictions.

The elders replaced him on the list of prospective apostles with Joseph Knox, a recently ordained evangelist. Another question was raised about whether one could serve in two offices at once, and what the difference was between an ordained office and a calling. Specifically, could Charles Brown and George Barnes (Barnes had replaced James Wagoner as one of Bickerton's counselors in January) be apostles since they were already in the presidency. This had been answered in the affirmative in Utah, where at the time the apostleship was held by men called to the church presidency. It had been different under Joseph Smith. In his day members of the presidency did not come from the Quorum of the Twelve.³⁶ Bickerton decided that his counselors would not serve in the Quorum of the Twelve. It would be the responsibility of the apostles, as in Joseph Smith's time, to preside over the missions. The church presidency would be elected and sustained annually, and the apostles would be in office for life. The presidency was elected, the apostles were ordained.³⁷

When that was settled, it was left to replace Charles Brown and George Barnes as prospective members of the Quorum of the Twelve. When Brown nominated William Cadman, Joseph Astin arose and spoke in tongues, interpreted by Mary Astin to mean, "Verily, Verily, thus saith the Lord God, ... I am well pleased with what ye are doing, it is according to My Will, therefore ye shall be blessed."³⁸ William Bickerton nominated James Nichols to replace George Barnes. Charles Brown then told the congregation he felt inspired to acknowledge John Dixon as a prophet like Bickerton for having demonstrated the gift of dreams and visions and thought he should be acknowledged for his gift and allowed to help guide the church. The elders stopped short

36. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 283; Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 85.

37. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 40.

38. *Ibid.*, 42.

of formally ordaining Dixon, so that the priesthood office was left to Bickerton alone, but they recognized Dixon's prophetic ability.³⁹

The church was assured on January 8 that to the extent they were "faithful in sowing the seeds" of the gospel, their effort "shall not return unto Me void," the interpretation of Joseph Astin's foreign tongue, received by Robert Riley. Later in the day, Astin again spoke in tongues, with George Barnes interpreting it as a paraphrase of Jesus, "Oh Elizabeth town how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings and you would not."⁴⁰

These two divine messages corresponded with the apocalyptic view of the Old Testament prophet Hosea, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness" because as "ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled" (Hosea 10:12–14). Echoing that theme, the Book of Mormon people lamented their mortality only when reminded by cataclysms: "O that we had repented before this great and terrible day," they cried. Jesus said to them, "Oh ye people of these great cities which have fallen ... how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" (3 Ne. 8:24; 10:4–6). Envisioning similar scenarios in the immediate future, Bickerton asked his ministry to institute a new church office, a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. This would be someone who could help prepare the world for the Second Advent.

What did he mean? Melchizedek in the Hebrew Bible is someone whose name meant "king of righteousness," who visited the patriarch Abraham and fed him bread and wine, blessed him, and received tribute of 10 percent (Gen. 14:18–20). In the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, Melchizedek was a model for Christ, in that he did not come from an established priesthood line and yet would overturn the established religious order, replacing the priesthood that

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 43; Matt. 23:37; 3 Ne. 10:4–6.

relied on lineage and protocol with a priesthood of special appointment and spontaneity. In the Psalms, David sang, “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.”⁴¹ This was a reference to Jesus, the apostle Paul concluded (Heb. 7:17).⁴²

The man to fill this auspicious office of high priest was Samuel Grimes, as announced on January 8, 1862, and after Grimes accepted the call and was endorsed by the elders he was ordained “after the order of Melchizedek” and given the “gifts of Wisdom and Revelation.”⁴³ Joseph Smith had installed high priests to hold “the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God,” with “the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant” (D&C 84:19; 107:19).⁴⁴ Grimes too was authorized to commune with the heavenly realm regarding the Savior’s return.⁴⁵

There were two orders of priesthood in Joseph Smith’s church. The members of the lower order (Aaronic Priesthood, including deacons, teachers, and priests) were allowed to administer the sacrament; priests could also baptize. Those of the higher order (Melchizedek Priesthood, including elders, seventies, high priests, patriarchs, apostles, prophets)

41. Ps. 110:4–6.

42. More is said about Melchizedek in the Book of Mormon, for instance that he “did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace” (Alma 13:14–18), another parallel to Jesus.

43. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 44.

44. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 258.

45. According to the book of Revelation, during the Millennium all believers will become kings and priests and reign alongside the Messiah (Rev. 5:10). Melchizedek had been a clear example of what the Saints would become as resurrected or transfigured personages during the Millennium, ruling as kings and priests over the world when the Savior returned.

conferred the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁶ Bickerton did not see the need to separate the priesthood offices in this way. Rather, the prophets, apostles, patriarchs, high priests, evangelists, and elders all held the Melchizedek Priesthood, while priests, teachers and deacons held ancillary positions. Anyone with the Melchizedek Priesthood had authority to baptize and bestow the Holy Ghost. There was not even a concept of a lower priesthood in Bickerton's writings or in the minutes of meetings.⁴⁷

There was now a high priest, but not a quorum of ordained apostles. Bickerton considered apostles to be the capstone in the priesthood architecture. Other religious reformers had imagined a day when men would act in the capacity of Jesus's original twelve. Roger Williams, for instance, the cleric who was exiled in 1635 from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was among those who thought it would be a positive development, probably in the context of the approaching Millennium.⁴⁸ When the revelation finally arrived to confirm the ordination of apostles, it came in the form of a vision to apostle-designate Benjamin Meadowcroft on the evening of May 28, 1862:

I saw a vision of a man and He stood before me, and in his hands were two pitchers, and he said unto me,—What seest thou? and I said two pitchers, full and running over. And then a voice behind me said, What is in them two pitchers? I said, I know not, but it is pure like unto crystal. The voice then said, Thou hast heard it said, when thou was before the Throne, that out of the servants of the living God (Lord) should flow living water. That is the living water, thou dost see, and the Man that carries it, What is his

46. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 74–75, 157–58; Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1996; Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 93. The evolution of priesthood in the 1830s is confusing. In June 1831 Smith and others were ordained to the high priesthood, which would later be interpreted to mean they were ordained high priests. Elders and others had been ordained in the church since 1830, without reference to a higher or lower priesthood. Richard Bushman explains that “Joseph may not have realized that elders were part of the Melchizedek Priesthood already and were being ordained to the office of high priest rather than receiving the powers of the high priesthood.” Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 157–58; for more, see Prince, *Power from on High*.

47. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 55. Bickerton did ordain some priests (18, 21).

48. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 2:498.

name? I replied Monstan Farneela, and he said, in other words, Melchizedek the Priest of the most High God and the voice said, see whither he goes. I lost sight of him for a little, I saw him again in the meeting, with—our brother, and he held the pitchers above their heads, and they began to speak with power, and they spoke with words that shook the whole house, There were some in the house that ran to hide themselves, but they could find no place, the voice said again to me, The things that thou hast seen, write them, for this shall be fulfilled in a few days, on your heads, and now prepare yourselves and wait with patience.⁴⁹

What Meadowcroft was saying was that he had seen Melchizedek himself. If the vision were true, the Old Testament king of righteousness would soon visit the congregation in the spirit and bring with him an endowment of authority. There could not have been a more explicit approval to ordain the apostles, at least given the metaphorical nature of visions.

While this was happening in Western Pennsylvania, the tumult across the country was becoming increasingly brutal. Battles raged east and west, on land and sea. In July, General Lee would push back the Union's advance toward Richmond in six engagements leaving more than 5,000 dead.⁵⁰ Prior to the Battle of Antietam in September, a Confederate lookout situated in the Blue Ridge Mountains, watched

the serpentine approach of four Union corps across the [Middletown] valley—twelve divisions with a total of thirty-two infantry brigades, not including one corps which was still beyond the Catoctins—he said later that “the Hebrew poet whose idea of the awe-inspiring is expressed by the phrase, ‘terrible as an army with banners,’ [doubtless] had his view from the top of a mountain.”⁵¹

In the subsequent engagement at Antietam Creek, near Sharpsburg, Maryland, the number of soldiers killed was 3,675, and an additional

49. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 44–45.

50. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 418, 457, 470–71.

51. Foote, *Civil War*, 1:675.

19,051 wounded. That brought the total casualties for one day's fighting to 22,726.

Back in Western Pennsylvania, two months before the Battle of Antietam, Benjamin Meadowcroft asked the Saints to fast for two days prior to the conference scheduled for July 5–8. When the Saints arrived in Green Oak, they were spiritually invigorated, though hungry. The opening hymn was chosen with purpose. The lyrics to “Come, Let Us Anew, Our Journey Pursue” encouraged the congregants to never rest “till the Master appear,” referencing the imminence of “the millennial year.” Meadowcroft spoke in tongues on July 7, and the interpretation sounded like a court bailiff announcing the next order of business: “Set apart—Set apart and ordain the twelve. Set apart and ordain.”⁵² In a cacophony of languages, eight men gave their approval, after which Bickerton invited the twelve selected individuals to the dais, with John Dixon replacing Andrew Rattray (reason unknown); William Cadman and James Nichols replacing Charles Brown and George Barnes of the church presidency; and Joseph Knox replacing military enlistee William Bacon. The rest of the twelve were the three Bickertons (Alexander, Arthur, Thomas), James Brown, Joseph Astin, Cummings Cherry, John Neish, and Meadowcroft. The secretary recorded that “when the ordinations were over,” everyone “praise[d] God and g[a]ve G[l]ory to him.”⁵³

As far as Bickerton was concerned, the church was now fully organized and ready to venture out while there was still time to rescue their fellow gentiles who were pure of heart and to follow the risen Lord's intention that they “assist my people, the remnant of Jacob [American Indians], and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Ne. 21:22–23). Later it would be noticed that the ordinations occurred on Tammuz 9 of the Hebrew calendar, the day commemorating the

52. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 44–46; *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 217.

53. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 46.

breach of Jerusalem's walls by Babylonian invaders, the scattering of Israel. The prophet Zechariah promised that Tammuz 9, a day of fasting, would one day become "to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts" (Zech. 8:19).⁵⁴

The next day Bickerton and others of the priesthood washed the apostles' feet and anointed their heads with oil. George Barnes raised his voice and said, "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye are My Sons and Daughters, and I have committed unto you the Keys of the Kingdom, therefore be faithful." Charles Brown proclaimed, "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O ye Twelve, whom I have chosen and ordained, I commit unto [you] the Keys of the Kingdom, and no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, until you have finished your work. I shall make you as a bow—and my word shall go from you as an arrow, and many shall cry out [‘]what shall we do?[']”⁵⁵ This paralleled what Jesus quoted to his disciples from Isaiah, that “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isa. 54:17; 3 Ne. 22:17).

The members in Green Oak saw these heavenly pronouncements as the ensign Isaiah had mentioned when he said, “All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the Lord said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place[,] like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”⁵⁶ The apostle William Cadman penned poetic verses to celebrate the step forward “to lead the Church, on Earth, to Heaven.”⁵⁷

In the midst of this pentecostal fervor and trauma of the Civil War, it would have been difficult to imagine normalcy. In February 1862

54. Jacob ben Asher, Orach Chayim 549, *Arba'ah Turim*, online at www.sefaria.org/Tur.

55. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 47.

56. Isaiah 18:1–4.

57. Cadman, *Personal Observations*, 9.

the poet Julia Ward Howe published in the *Atlantic Monthly* the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” linking Armageddon with the Civil War.⁵⁸ “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,” she wrote. It was a “sour ripe grape,” Isaiah had written of the fruit that would be destroyed by trimming the branches (Isa. 18:5). “He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat,” Howe’s verse continued. “When he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye,” Isaiah had warned (18:3). The feeling in the chapel must have been as fervent as any emotion on the battlefield.

58. Florence Howe Hall, *The Story of the Battle Hymn of the Republic*, 56; *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 60.

EIGHT

THE ENSIGN

1862–65

“Son of man, Prophesy and say, Thus Saith the Lord, God, unto my people and servants, Fear ye not, ... for I have chosen you ... to administer my word unto the people of the nations of the earth and they shall write to you from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South, to know the truth, and the way of Salvation for I have given that knowledge unto you.”

—revelation, Benjamin Meadowcroft, Nov. 9, 1863

Now that William Bickerton had put in place a Quorum of Twelve Apostles, he turned his attention to the devastation around him and the need to establish an ensign that the elect could look to and gather around. Some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War occurred in 1862.¹ As Joseph Smith said in his Civil War prophecy, “Thus with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn.”² In October 1862 photographer Matthew Brady staged an exhibition in Manhattan that brought the carnage of the Civil War to the eyes of the average citizen. A *New York Times* journalist wrote that “if [Brady] has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it.”³ In similar fashion, the followers of the coal-mining prophet in West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania,

1. The major battles and casualties were Fredericksburg (17,000), Second Bull Run (16,000), Shiloh (24,000), and Stones River (25,000).

2. Doctrine and Covenants 87:6.

3. “Brady’s Photographs: Pictures of the Dead at Antietam,” *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1862.

believed the banner they were raising in the Allegheny foothills would draw the attention of the entire world.

Already in 1859, Webster Wagoner thought the “Ensign ha[d] been lifted,” the “Standard raised.” But thus far, it was a metaphorical ensign.⁴ They needed something literal—for instance, a publication missionaries could take with them to show what was happening in Pennsylvania. If so, what type of publication? It took two years for the idea to become a reality, but by the end of 1863 they would produce their first pamphlet, printed nearby in Pittsburgh, as a review of the church’s history, doctrines, and revelations. It was addressed to “the Right Honorable President elect, and to the Senators, Governors and Representatives of these United States, and likewise to Kings, Potentates and rulers of the whole earth and to all people.” Appropriately titled *The Ensign*, the full title, in keeping with the custom of the time, read like a table of contents: *The Ensign: or a Light to Lighten the Gentiles in which the Doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is Set Forth, and Scripture Evidence Adduced to Establish It. Also, a Brief Treatise upon the Most Important Prophecies Recorded in the Old and New Testaments, which relate to the Great Work of God or the Latter Days.*

More specifically, it contained a personal history written by William Bickerton, a defense of the Book of Mormon, a review of the larger Latter Day Saint movement, and the church’s views on marriage and national government. It stated exactly why the Pennsylvania Saints had separated themselves from the Mormon Church in Utah; it indicated why Bickerton was the rightful successor to Joseph Smith. The tract explained that the church adhered to traditional Christian precepts, not the alleged Utah heresies involving polygamy, baptism for the dead, and the plurality of gods. It included this warning: “Therefore the angel [Moroni] has restored the everlasting gospel and it is preached by this people, by way of commandment, declaring the hour of God’s judgments is come, and these things will speedily be all

4. “Book of Record,” 11.

fulfilled, and, therefore; seeing the calamities which are coming upon the nations of the earth, we feel it to be our bounden duty to present this memorial to all people.”⁵

While Bickerton and his two counselors and two of the apostles began thinking about what they should include in the missionary tract, Bickerton was following the progress of the Civil War for the signs of the end of the world “when the choice of God shall rise of the seed of Joseph,” meaning the Choice Seer who would emerge among the Native Americans and his following.⁶ While everyone else’s eyes were on the North and South, the Bickertonites kept at least a peripheral gaze on the West. Nor could Charles Brown, George Barnes, William Cadman, and Joseph Astin devote too much time to writing just yet. In mid-1862, Brown and Cadman were sent to Virginia to preach, right into the heart of the Civil War conflict, the stronghold of the Confederacy. Other missionary assignments indicated that the church was widening its reach, two elders being sent to Ohio and two, Arthur Bickerton and John Stevenson, to West Virginia. A final missionary pair was directed to the areas of Brownsville, Fayette City, and Mt. Pleasant, about thirty miles south of the church’s headquarters in Green Oak, where the elders encountered success. To Bickerton’s delight, the missionaries in Virginia also baptized thirty people. In addition, while Brown was preaching one day, a man began convulsing, so Brown “left the pulpit, took the man by the hand, raised him up[,] and the fit left him.” This confirmed to the onlookers that Brown possessed the gift of healing, increasing their interest in his message. The elders in West Virginia “brought in many souls,” Bickerton reported. The two in Pennsylvania converted eighty-four people. On the other hand, the two in Ohio “did not agree with each other and did not do much good,” Bickerton was sorry to disclose. Still, the overall results were so good, “I am giving this to show that it was the word of the Lord,” he announced, citing “more than two

5. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 5.

6. *Ibid.*, 17.

hundred” people who joined the church as a result of the 1862 outreach.⁷ Many more would be converted during the Civil War.

As the war raged through the year, the shock of the number of deaths reminded some people of life’s tenuousness and drew them closer to God, while news of one loss after another on the battlefield embittered others. Only a month after the church’s July 1862 conference, Union troops were defeated a second time at Bull Run, at the same place they had been forced to retreat from, with heavy losses, a year earlier. Clara Barton, a volunteer with the ladies’ aid society of Washington, DC, recorded that wounded men “were brot down from the field and laid on the ground [on beds of hay] beside the train and so back up the hill ‘till they covered acres.” The scene she described was horrific. “By midnight there must have been three thousand helpless men lying in that hay,” she wrote. “All night we made compresses and slings—and bound up and wet wounds when we could get water, fed what we could, travelled miles in that dark over these poor helpless wretches, in terror lest some one’s candle fall into the hay and consume them all.” Soon after the Second Battle of Bull Run (also known as Second Manassas), word came that Cincinnati, which like Pittsburgh lay on the Ohio River, was also under threat by Confederate cavalry, although the invaders were quickly repelled by Union defenses.⁸

None of this was a surprise to William Bickerton, nor was it welcome news, since his oldest son, James, had enlisted on August 7, 1862, as part of an infantry regiment. When James’s term expired, he signed up again, this time with the Pennsylvania 14th Cavalry Regiment.⁹ Part of the reason for his enlistment was that “there was no work to be had” in West Elizabeth. “I sent my oldest son, 17 years of age to war,” Bickerton grieved.¹⁰ While William tried his best to keep the church united and contributed as much as he could to his family’s

7. Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 11.

8. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 532–33.

9. He enlisted for ninety days as a fifer before switching to a two-year enlistment with mounted troops. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 4:77, 870.

10. Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 10; James Bickerton was listed as sixteen years

upkeep, he even left for a time to work near Pittsburgh. "I was over age for a soldier, so I went and worked [in a coal mine] at Sawmill Run," he wrote, referring to the creek by that name that feeds into the Ohio River. The Pittsburgh Coal Company had just opened a mine and built an access road from Coal Hill (Mt. Washington) and needed workers. It was twenty miles north of Elizabeth, where, separated from his family, the forty-seven-year-old church leader was still shoveling coal, this time to fuel Union factories, locomotives, and the war effort. His absence placed a burden on his wife and children. "My Brother sent me word that my wife had no provisions, and I sent her ten dollars," he wrote.¹¹ With the demand for war materiel, prices rose. At the same time, the effects of the Panic of 1857 still lingered. Another market run in 1861, stimulated by the South's secession, kept wages low. Between 1863 and 1864, real wages fell an average of 20 percent, at the same time prices were rising.¹²

Not only were individual households in trouble, the church itself was deeply in debt and had fallen behind in its payments for its headquarters in Green Oak. On August 30, 1862, the last day of the Second Battle of Bull Run, the elders met to decide what to do about their debts. In retrospect many years later, Bickerton realized it had been a mistake to dedicate a chapel before it was paid for. In Green Oak all seemed well for three years until they had to make the final balloon payments, to which Bickerton contributed \$200 (\$5,000 today) in the final push, and others contributed significant amounts; still, not everyone pitched in, much to Bickerton's irritation. "The money had to be paid to the builders. It was in war time, and as I was the President of the Church, the Sheriff served papers on me, and I was sued." Because the economy was unstable, the builders demanded payment in hard currency. "The builders would take nothing but gold," Bickerton recorded.¹³

old in the 1860 census, likely making him eighteen in 1862. See the United States Census, West Elizabeth, Allegheny County, June 25, 1860.

11. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 10; Wall, *Second Geological Survey*, 179.

12. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 448–50.

13. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 9.

Unsure what to do, a committee of seven men¹⁴ was appointed to meet in Green Oak to sketch out a resolution. They did not like carrying debt (the apostle Paul had exhorted the churches in the New Testament to “owe no man anything,” Rom. 13:8) and could not imagine defaulting. At the same time, they knew how much all the members were being squeezed by the rising costs and sinking wages. So the seven men meeting on September 6, 1862, decided that, for now, they would simply make one more request for donations from the members, for whatever amount anyone could manage to pay. They also prioritized what the church owed, placing debts owed to members ahead of the building cost. The first in line was George Barnes, the committee chair, who was owed \$80, followed by Peter Webb, who was owed \$100, and a Sister Lewis who had loaned the church \$10.¹⁵ Having come up with a weak plan that lacked urgency, the predictable result was that the church was unable to see an appreciable increase in collections and Bickerton himself would end up having to contribute another \$400 in 1863, about a year’s earnings for a coal miner.¹⁶

Seemingly unconcerned about the finances in Green Oak, the members in West Elizabeth were simultaneously clamoring for a building of their own because they were “meeting from house to house” without enough room for everyone, “and many found fault and wished to have the meetings” moved to a building of some sort, if not a chapel. As Bickerton thought about this, he “heard the song of ‘Home Sweet Home’ being sung [in his head] by voices not visible but far superior to human voices, and it brought such glorious blessings to me,” he said, that he interpreted it as a message to obtain a chapel for the West Elizabeth Saints. The song was popular at the time, a show tune composed by Sir Henry Bishop and lyricized by an American-born playwright living in London, John Howard Payne, for *Clari: Or the Maid of Milan*,

14. George Barnes, Joseph Astin, James Brown, Cummings Cherry, Benjamin Meadowcroft, John Neish, and John Tilford.

15. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 47–48.

16. Ibid., 56; Bickerton, “Testimony, June 1903,” 9.

which premiered in 1823 at Covent Garden Theatre. The lyrics to the second verse read:

An exile from home, splendor dazzles in vain:
 Oh! give me my lowly thatched cottage again!
 The birds singing gayly, that come at my call,—
 Give me them, with the peace of mind dearer than all.

The song had tugged at Bickerton's heart. King Solomon was credited with having said, "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it" (Prov. 3:27). Thinking along those lines, Bickerton "went the next day and purchased" a building to use as a church. He paid \$250 that was needed by his family, but found the sacrifice made him happy. "About this time I saw a vision of a table spread with no end to it as far as I could see, and I saw the saints feasting on all sides of the table, and all were rejoicing." He said he "never slept that night, on account of the glory of God that I experienced, it lasting the whole night." After "feasting on heavenly food" for an evening, he concluded that "no one knows without the experience. No tongue can express the peace and rest of a soul wrapt in Jesus' love."¹⁷

The sentimentality on his part was probably due to his wife's unexpected death that year at the age of about thirty-seven, although the exact date and cause of death are unknown. One can imagine Dorothy overextending herself in caring, without sufficient means, for their seven children: James, Eliza Ann, Josephine (who died in 1852), Clara Virginia, Angeline Ann, Josephine, and Florence. Four of the girls were still young—Clara Virginia ten, Angeline Ann seven, Josephine five, and Florence three—and would be helped by their older sister, Eliza Ann, who was fifteen. Dorothy was William's devoted companion for two decades, and the grief at her passing no doubt was acute.¹⁸

The next development would be humorous if not so tragic, but no sooner had the West Elizabeth congregation moved into its new

17. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 9–10.

18. Pilgrim, "Descendants of Thomas Bickerton," 2; Bickerton, *St. John Weekly News*, Aug. 16, 1889.

building than the increase in convert baptisms made it too small to accommodate the number of members and they had to look for a larger building. "There was scarcely a week passed without baptisms," Bickerton wrote. Next he paid \$150 for a brick schoolhouse and \$60 for pews, and "there was not a member that helped me pay for anything," he complained, "except my Brother Furnished two stoves."¹⁹ But in exchange for his charity, he was repaid by the fact that his gospel message continued to resonate with so many new converts.

The country had seemed to be coming around to Bickerton's way of thinking in late September 1862 when Abraham Lincoln met with his cabinet and told them he had made a covenant with God that if the Union drove rebels from Maryland, he would free the slaves in the Confederacy. He had been working on a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, drawing on his wartime authority to seize the enemy's resources. He wanted to inform the South that any slaves still in captivity on January 1, 1863, would be recognized by the North as liberated. He did not have the authority to free slaves in the North, only in the states that had seceded from the Union, and in practicality only in areas the Union had won back to the country. Nevertheless, it was a first step. "We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree," Frederick Douglass exclaimed. Lincoln signed the document on New Year's Day 1863. He simultaneously pushed for the enlistment of blacks. The military responded reluctantly at first by utilizing them only "to garrison forts" and not in the field, but before long there were units of black soldiers at the front lines too. Lincoln confided to Andrew Johnson, governor of the part of Tennessee the Union had won back, that "the bare sight of fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi, would end the rebellion at once."²⁰ In essence, Lincoln had transformed the country's forces into an army of liberation and had invited the slaves to help the effort to win the war. What rang in Bickerton's head, no

19. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 10–11.

20. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 557–66.

doubt, when he heard this was the prediction that it “will come to pass, after many days, [that] slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for war,” a line from Joseph Smith’s prophecy (D&C 87:4).

Just as the army felt the need to recruit increasing numbers of soldiers, so did the church in battling forces of darkness with an army of preachers. Bickerton felt he needed to ordain more officers and extend their reach to distribute the burden of maintaining the church. He was not above reworking the church’s organizational structure to do so. There was an endless amount of work involved in overseeing church business, including the need to visit all the various branches, interact with the members, and advise the ministry. He began sending others out to the branches, pleased to have Andrew Rattray travel to Wheeling, Virginia, in October 1862, for instance. With the war on everyone’s mind, Rattray employed military language as he encouraged the membership. “Stand to your posts,” he said. As a word of comfort, channeling the voice of the Lord, he uttered the promise, “Be faithful and I will bless you.” Later in the day at the Wheeling conference, Luke Smith and Rebecca Dixon received baptism. When the new members had hands laid on their heads to bestow the Holy Ghost, Luke Smith spoke in tongues. “Sister Rattray” gave the interpretation a more pacifist theme than Andrew’s message, admonishing the members to “seek for knowledge” and learn “the mystery of the Kingdom of God.” John Stevenson suggested that since the new member had exercised a spiritual gift, they should ordain him. By day’s end, Luke Smith had been baptized, confirmed, and ordained, which was fairly atypical.²¹

Much to Bickerton’s delight, the ministry called seventeen men as evangelists on January 5, 1863. In addition, Charles Brown suggested that they ordain Bickerton to the office of “prophet, seer, and revelator,” which would be a new position in the church. Previously Bickerton had been ordained a prophet only. When the ministry had agreed to the proposition, Brown washed his leader’s feet and anointed

21. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 48–49.

his head with oil. This raised the expectation that the time was ripe for the sealed portion of the gold plates of the Book of Mormon to be translated, no doubt the writings of the brother of Jared that the Book of Mormon described as being extraordinary “unto the overpowering of man to read them” (Ether 12:24). After the ordinance, Bickerton and Brown walked around the congregation pronouncing blessings on all the women, not wanting to exclude them after so much focus on the male priesthood.²²

Later that month, Bickerton reversed himself on whether his counselors could be apostles. Now it occurred to him that Charles Brown and George Barnes, contrary to his previous reasoning, should in fact become “Apostles and Counselors of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”²³ He no doubt remembered that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were referred to as apostles in August 1830, four months after they had ordained each other elders on April 6, 1830, the date of the original church’s organization. In an August revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord said he had “ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name.”²⁴ It may be that the titles *elder* and *apostle* were considered interchangeable at the time, and not that they referred to separate offices. Whatever the case, the change for Bickerton’s counselors had the effect of bestowing more clout. They would not become part of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, yet would have their authority extended beyond the local areas where the church had congregations to the mission regions as well.

On March 17, 1863, apostle James Nichols shared a dream that confirmed the idea of the twelve dividing their attention between the home and foreign locations:

I dreamed that I had been to a meeting, but I can’t exactly tell where. But I thought that me and some of the brethren was taking a walk in a field

22. Ibid., 50.

23. Ibid.

24. This has been interpreted to refer to the appearance of the spirits of Peter, James, and John to bestow the Melchizedek Priesthood on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, D&C 27:12; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 140.

and we stopped and sung, “Stars of the Morning Shout for Joy” when there was a very bright light appeared in the sky, apparently in the East, and I thought I was sitting on a fence, with my back toward the East, when there was another great light appeared in the East, but my back was to it, but I saw the brightness of it[,] and it appeared to be brighter than the sun, and appeared to come out of a dark cloud. And I looked around and saw a crown of twelve stars in the sky, partly clouded over. A short distance from where the light came out, ... I thought the stars went away one by one, until they all went but five and these five appeared very bright, and there appeared to be an arrow across each one, and the five appeared to form a line, all connected together, so beautiful that I cannot describe, and I clapped my hands and glorified God.²⁵

The crown of twelve stars represented the apostles, he realized, similar to the vision Charlotte Hibbs had seen in 1860, only this time five of the apostles would stay in place and seven would travel elsewhere. Drawing on the prophecy of Charles Brown of July 1862, the arrows referred to preaching the word of God. The hymn Nichols referred to included a line in the second verse, “Come ye tribes of every land,” with a refrain, “and praise the Lamb.” It was a reference to missionary labor and a gathering prior to the Millennium. In the third verse, the kingdom comes to the Savior when he defeats “the man of sin.” “Bring the blest millennium,” the refrain goes.²⁶ Apostles Joseph Astin and Benjamin Meadowcroft accepted the dream as revelatory and spoke in tongues, Meadowcroft interpreting it as a message from Christ, “I will give power to my servant Wm Bickerton, to bind the man of Sin, and shut the door and take the key that binds old Satan a Thousand years.”²⁷

When the spring arrived, Bickerton found the country chastised and uncertain of victory. Abraham Lincoln considered the war to be God’s judgment for sin, something Bickerton agreed with wholeheartedly. The president called for a national day of fasting and prayer, saying:

25. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 52.

26. *Deseret Sunday School Song Book*, 9.

27. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 52.

May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.²⁸

The day of national prayer, although earnestly promoted, had another motivation, as well, in diverting attention away from the unpopular Enrollment Act that Lincoln signed on March 3, 1863, requiring every male citizen to enroll for conscription, along with any immigrant who had applied for citizenship between twenty and forty-five years of age.

On April 5, apostle Joseph Astin baptized four new members: Thomas Weld, Jane Robinson, Mary Taylor, and Margaret Barnes. A member who had recently returned back into fellowship, Charles Cowan, spoke in tongues and gave his own interpretation: "Thus Saith the Lord, This is my Church, and these are my servants that you have come to hear tonight. They have authority to adopt you into my church, and there is no other Church that is my church but this Church and these are my servants and I will bless them and be with them."²⁹ The four new members were treated to this special welcome into the church by God himself through revelation.

An interesting new development on April 6, 1863, was the suggestion that the church should appoint women as deaconesses.

28. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 5:155–57.

29. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 52.

Charles Cowan and Joseph Knox suggested it after they learned the apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, used the Greek word *diakonia* for what was translated into the English word *servant*. “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant [deaconess] of the church which is at Cenchrea,” the text reads (Rom. 16:1–2).³⁰ A deacon was expected to care for widows and orphans and to perform “wonders and miracles” (Acts 6). A woman could do that as well as a man, Cowan and Knox reasoned. Deaconesses would also be allowed to deliver communion to shut-ins after the elders had blessed it, and they could anoint a woman to be healed if an ordained man was not present. Spurred by this remarkable development, the Saints decided to appoint midwives not only to care for pregnant women but also to look after and treat the sick and afflicted. The church voted to “have nothing to do with the Doctors at all.”³¹

Midwives were more competent than doctors in any case in performing births in the antebellum age. On the battlefield, surgeons were employed to saw off limbs, while most of the restorative care was performed by female volunteers. In the face of infectious disease, doctors watched helplessly as one regiment after another was reduced by half through sickness. “Our doctor knows about as much as a ten year old boy,” one soldier complained in a letter home. Another described a field hospital near a farm where “about the building you could see the Hogs belonging to the Farm eating [amputated] arms and other portions.”³² The issue for the Bickertonites was, of course, that they would be protected by the miraculous power of faith healing and could see no benefit to crude medical care.

The Saints continued their discussion of Bible translations on April 7, aware that the king’s version was beautifully written but not

30. See also Rom. 16:6, 12; Titus 2:3–5; *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 940. Greek word *diakonia* found in “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” 22, reference number 1248.

31. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 145; Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 51, 145.

32. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 486–87, 477.

as precisely translated as some of the versions that had appeared since 1611. Joseph Smith also thought the King James Version needed to be corrected and made changes to the Bible and the Book of Mormon both. As invigorating and productive as the conversation was, it did not sit well with Bickerton, who saw it as an attack on the source of his interpretations of ancient prophecy. Christ, for whom he served as amanuensis, agreed with him: “Verily thus saith the Lord, seek not to pull down the scriptures, ... Preach my word, though there be many wrong translations in it. ... And by this the world shall know that I am the Lord. Hear ye this, for this is my Church and I will let nothing pass that is not according to my will—Saith the Lord, God of Heaven.”³³

That put an end for the moment to the exegetical exercises the members had been engaged in. If the texts contained mistakes, the lessons were clear enough, the Bickertonites concluded. Besides that, who knew where the discussion would end if they questioned the provenance of the word of God? The Book of Mormon stated it clearly: “For behold, this [book] is written for the intent that ye may believe” that other book of scripture, the Bible (Morm. 7:8–9). One purpose of scripture was to convince the Saints of the last days to heed the modern prophet. Where would it lead if they questioned the texts Bickerton had relied on?

At the summer conference in Green Oak on July 5, 1863, the Book of Mormon became the topic of preaching. John Stevenson spoke the word of the Lord, that if they failed to take the Book of Mormon with them when they went into the world to preach, “the blood of this generation will rest upon you.” At any other time, the warning might have sounded poetic or soteriological, but in the middle of the Civil War, geographically and chronologically, it must have been unsettling. Two days earlier, 180 miles to the southeast, the deadliest battle of the Civil War had taken place in Gettysburg on Pennsylvania soil. It produced 51,000 casualties, including over 3,000 Union dead, and had begun over the pitiable state of Confederate supplies and a rumor that

33. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 53.

Gettysburg had a supply of shoes. The Confederate commander Ambrose Hill authorized a division of soldiers to enter the town and grab the shoes. As they approached, they collided with two Union cavalry brigades. From there, the battle grew into a turning point of the war.³⁴

As reinforcements poured in on both sides, the Confederate artillery barrage on the Union positions could be heard as far away as Pittsburgh and presumably in Green Oak. The dust settled, and General Lee found he had lost a third of his Confederate army. The Union had lost more than one quarter of its force. There was better news from Mississippi, although with an equally grisly body count of about 4,000 killed, where on July 4 troops led by US General Ulysses S. Grant captured the fort overlooking the Mississippi River at Vicksburg. Yet even as the North celebrated this victory, a Confederate force of 2,500 cavalry advanced as far north as Steubenville, Ohio, forty miles west of Pittsburgh. And the draft riots in New York City that month left 120 dead and about 2,000 wounded.

The Saints were confident that they would survive the terror surrounding them by waiting it out. Yet their rhetoric, like Andrew Rattray's in Virginia, was being influenced by the harshness of the war. On July 5, George Meadowcroft commanded the members in the name of the Lord that they "go forth and crush all other systems. Rejoice, Rejoice, ye Saints of the Most High." Charles Cowan arose and predicted that anyone who opposed them "shall perish." Bickerton verified the next day that "no one has power to cut you off." On a more gentle note, James McDowell picked up the theme earlier introduced by Sister Rattray and again promised the "key of knowledge." "Not many days hence, in this Valley," he said, speaking for Christ, "I will pour out My Spirit and give unto them the Key of Knowledge, whereby they may open the door of the Church of Jesus Christ and behold the glories of God."³⁵

On July 6 the church added personnel to the priesthood and issued

34. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 653.

35. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 54–55.

more mission calls. James McDowell was asked to join Samuel Grimes in the high priest's office. The Lord said of McDowell, "I know him, and I have proved him, therefore I have a great work for him to do." After Andrew Rattray was called to the same office, he and McDowell were ordained. Two days later the ministry called eleven men on mission tours, seven of them from the Quorum of the Twelve—Alexander Bickerton, Arthur Bickerton, James Brown, William Cadman, John Dixon, Joseph Knox, and James Nichols—in fulfillment of the dream Nichols had of the crown of twelve stars, seven of them becoming separated from the rest. As the apostles went out into the world, there was "a tremendous storm," Nichols recalled from his dream. The Civil War qualified as that tempest. The seven would be joined by the two apostle-counselors George Barnes and Charles Brown—and by William Skillen and John Stevenson.³⁶

Before their departure, and before the summer conference ended, the church took a recess on July 8 to marry the prophet to Charlotte Hibbs in the Green Oak chapel, James Brown conducting. It was a day of celebration on two counts, since they were also able to rededicate the Green Oak building after having completed payment to the builders. The dedication was accepted by revelation to Bickerton: "Ye shall meet in this house that you built in My name for [now] to fill up the organization, and from thence ye shall go forth unto all nations." The secretary recorded that members "rejoice[d] with joy unspeakable." Charlotte Bickerton, *née* Hibbs, had been a follower of Bickerton since the 1850s and enjoyed similar spiritual gifts, which meant she appreciated him on a level most other women would not have understood. She knew she was wedding not only the prophet but also the church. At forty-four, she would become the instant mother of six, five of whom needed to be raised to maturity. In addition, in July 1865 she would give birth to her own son, William Alma. It was a lot of responsibility to assume over a short period of time.³⁷

36. Ibid., 54–56 & 52.

37. Ibid., 56; Pilgrim, "Descendants of Thomas Bickerton," 2.

Despite the wedding, the conference continued to address routine business. The elders appointed three men to get the missionary pamphlet printed. Until then, what should they use on their mission tours? they wondered. The answer from the Lord came through Joseph Astin that for now the Bible and Book of Mormon would suffice. After all, “there is no other records to be given to the Gentiles.” Should they begin preaching to the Indians? When would the sealed portion be revealed? As timely as these questions were, the day was coming to a close and they would have to pick up these themes at a more opportune time.³⁸

On July 9 apostle Benjamin Meadowcroft and high priest Andrew Rattray began by suggesting that they endorse William Bickerton as their prophet, seer, and revelator, a touching gesture. Bickerton responded by saying he wanted to be assisted by others in the office, and so he proceeded to lay his hands on his counselors, Charles Brown and George Barnes, and ordain them to the same office. He remembered his rival in Utah who claimed the same authority. Suddenly he spoke in God’s voice that something should be done about the effrontery in Utah: “Verily, saith the Lord God. It is My Will that they be seperated from the Priesthood.” The official minutes read that it was “moved by President Wm Bickerton and seconded by counselor Charles Brown, that the first Presidency of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ, as organized by Joseph Smith, but has now become poluted, therefore they are, this ninth day, of the Seventh month, in the year of our Lord, 1863, [to] be seperated from the Holy Priesthood.” The conference then excommunicated all the ordained officers of the Latter-day Saints in Utah.³⁹ Bickerton believed the authority held by his ministry was unmatched by any other.

38. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 56–57. Although Joseph Astin declared that God would give no other records to the gentiles, the Saints did not interpret this to mean that the Lord would not give them the sealed record of the gold plates. The Book of Mormon states that when the gentiles exercise faith like the brother of Jared, “then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ” (Ether 4:6–7) Therefore, the Saints understood that Astin’s message merely referred to the other records that the Choice Seer would translate.

39. Ibid., 57–58.

To understand what drove his resolve, a sermon he gave at the October 4, 1863, conference on the topic of faith is instructive. It gives a flavor of his rhetorical style as he hammers home each point through repetition, posing and answering questions, and appealing to scripture even while advocating contemporary revelation to supplement the existing canon:

For without faith we cannot receive revelation from God[,] and without revelation from God for ourselves, we cannot know God. For no man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy spirit, which is the revelation of Jesus Christ in your souls. For instance, the faith that Abel had, came by revelation that his offering pleased God more than his brother Cain's[,] and Abel's faith would not do for Enoch, no he must have faith, and revelation for himself, and his revelation would not do for Noah[,] for except Noah had received revelation from God for himself he would not have had faith to build the Ark, where by he and his household were saved, and again Noah's revelations would never have satisfied Abraham[.] No, unless he had received revelation from God for himself that he must offer up Isaac[,] he would not have offered him. For the Lord had promised unto him that in his seed, all nations of the world would be blessed, therefore he staggered not at the commandment but offered Isaac, knowing that God was able to raise seed to him from the ashes of his son. Therefore in faith, he offered up his son. And what then? The word of the Lord was given to him by an Angel—saying, now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thine only son from Me. And therefore it was counted unto him for righteousness. And, again Abraham's revelation would not do for Isaac, or Jacob[,] and their revelations would not do for anyone else. No! Every man must have his own revelation for himself or he can never know whether he is acceptable in the sight of God. For no man can say that Jesus is the Christ, but by the revelation of Jesus in his soul, "Hear the word of the Lord," John 7:17. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. Verse 18. He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory. But he that seeketh His glory that sent him[,] the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." Now how can we know? Why, we must enter the new and everlasting covenant with [the Lord], and then he has promised to put His laws in our minds, and write them in our hearts, and he will be unto

you a God, and you shall be His people. And ye need not teach every man his neighbor and every man his brother[,] saying “know ye the Lord,” for all shall know me from the least to the greatest, for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins, and their iniquities will I remember no more. So then we see it is the privilege of all mankind to know the Lord for themselves, and also of His doctrines, as our Lord has said, “Come one come all and obey the doctrines of Him that sent us and you shall be made to rejoice with that Joy unspeakable and full of glory,[”] as our savior has said. And now dear brothers and sisters, let us earnestly contend for the faith that was delivered[,] which faith cometh by hearing[,] and hearing by the word of God and the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you.⁴⁰

The following day, Bickerton’s wife shared a vision she had received early that morning. It confirmed the prophetic mission of the church:

I saw myself in a large and beautiful pasture field, where an angel gave me a[n] [entrance] pass. I went on through the field to a place where there was a large tree standing, and the leaves of the tree were so bright[,] they shined like gold, there was a small gate that I knocked at, it opened, and I went on through. I was then asked for my pass by the angel. I gave it to him[,] and he looked at it[,] and saw a mark on it, and he asked me how the mark came there. I told him, I did not know. He then put his finger on the mark, and it disapeared, he then told me to pass on. I was in the Garden of Paradise ... and everything looked so beautiful. And in the center there stood a small building, it appeared to be all pure gold, and there was written on it in large letters Rest for the Weary take upon you my cross and you shall find rest. The Savior stood on top of the building with His arms out stretched, and the tears were treckling down His cheeks, pleading for sinners. I heard beautiful music but I could not see it, I also saw Angels enjoying themselves. I went on and, behold I did meet the same woman that I saw in Elizabethtown three years and 3 mo. ago, she had the crown of twelve stars upon her head, and two large lights in her hands and she said, These two lights was for the Prophet and that there was a church to be built up as a Standard in this place.⁴¹

40. Ibid., 58–59.

41. Ibid., 60.

This vision enthralled the Saints. They must have seen Charlotte as a perfect complement to their leader. The next day, October 6, the ministry responded to the vision by calling additional men on mission tours: George Barnes and Joseph Knox to Ohio; Frederick Abling to “preach to his countrymen, the Germans”; and Andrew Rattray and A. (Alexander or Arthur) Bickerton to an undisclosed area. This was done when the Confederate army had besieged Chattanooga, Tennessee, and food and clothing were in short supply, yet the missionaries traveled “without purse, and scrip, and shoes,” as the Bible advised (Luke 22:35). Their mood was one of fearlessness, trusting they would be provided for.⁴²

To the Saints’ surprise in the fall of 1863, they received a visit from an emissary of Sidney Rigdon. The former leader was still living in a rural part of upstate New York. By correspondence, Rigdon had called a missionary named Stephen Post to travel to Pittsburgh and elsewhere in order to gather in the remnants of the church Rigdon had once presided over. Post had previously aligned with James Strang, prior to his correspondence with Rigdon in 1856 to inquire about Rigdon’s ministry. His letter had ignited the prophetic fire in the old man’s heart, so that on March 17, 1856, Rigdon penned a letter calling Post to an evangelical partnership in which Rigdon would give him directions by mail. His letter said, in part,

And now I the Lord ... call [thee] to a great work in assisting my servant Sidney Rigdon in preparing the way before me, and Elijah which should come, and I say unto thee, as my servant Sidney Rigdon assisted my servant Joseph Smith with all his might mind and strength ... I [have] called thee to assist my servant Sidney Rigdon. ... Thine eyes shall see mine elect gathered and Zion redeemed, and thou shall shout Hosannahs in the midst of my people while Babylon shall shake and tremble, and the inhabitants thereof shall quake with fear, and howl, and weep, and mourn for anguish of soul, even so, amen.⁴³

42. Ibid.

43. Rigdon to Post, Mar. 17, 1856, Post Collection, box 3, fd. 12, LDS Church History Library, cited in Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 403.

Rigdon was also corresponding with a former member in Philadelphia, Joseph H. Newton, guiding him by revelation as well. In the summer of 1863, Rigdon spent more than three weeks in Philadelphia ordaining men to the priesthood and setting up a new organization to be called the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion. Then he returned to the seclusion of his daughter's home in Friendship, New York. His overall plan was to send followers to Iowa, once he could get a report on conditions there.⁴⁴

In September Rigdon wrote to Post about his time in the City of Brotherly Love:

The Lord commenced his work in Philadelphia in a way that I could not tell what he was going to do but as it progressed and as it now exists he had let us all see what he was doing. He was bringing together those, however far apart, who had been calling upon him for the deliverance of Zion and forming a provisional government with which to move the cause of Zion. He has called on five persons with whom he has formed this government and by who he will move the cause of Zion namely the three persons [in Philadelphia, as well as] ... yourself and myself.

Post was “not to preach the gospel to the world but [e]ntirely with that old church,” meaning the former Rigdonites and other Latter Day Saints, including those from Pittsburgh “to the [Great] Lakes and as far west as that people are scattered.” Converts were to “dispose of their affairs and go west of the Mississippi quietly as other citizens go” and establish settlements until called for.⁴⁵ Post was to carry Rigdon's *An Appeal to the Latter-Day Saints* to discount the claims of Joseph Smith III. Since 1860 the oldest son of Joseph Smith had been leading the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) from Nauvoo, Illinois. Post was told to visit Joseph Smith III “to warn him of the judgments of God” unless he repented of “his abominations before the Lord.” Post chose to travel first to the Pittsburgh area to convert the Bickertonites.

44. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 405–06; Gregory, “Sidney Rigdon: Post Nauvoo,” 55–56.

45. Rigdon to Post, Sept. 26, 1863, Post Collection, box 5, fd. 7.

When he arrived at William Bickerton's home in West Elizabeth on the morning of Thursday, October 22, the Saints welcomed their guest. Post recalled the visit in his journal:

This morning I arrived at the house of Wm Bickerton the founder of a large organization of Latter Day saints who recognize him as their prophet seer & revelator. I was introduced to several elders & also to the prophet during the day[.] Several told me that they had seen me in vision & knew me as soon as they saw me.

It may have appeared to Post at first that Rigdon's prophecy was coming true. Since people had seen him in vision before his arrival, he was sure to convince them of the importance of joining with Rigdon for the ushering in of Zion. Soon enough, though, he realized he had misread the situation. Returning to his journal, he wrote that

all seemed anxious to teach me and that I should join them[,] several giving me their testimonies in regard to what they knew about the work[,] all affirming that this was the only true church & that all the latter day saints would have to come through this church to have their standing in the great work of the last days[.] Wm Bickerton explained his position to be that this was the true church acknowledged as the church of Alma which was raised up through the preaching of Abinadi. That he had raised it up by revelation and [he] was now sending the gospel to the Gentiles with good success having organized [the church] with apostles councillors &c[.]

Bickerton invited Post to speak to his church that evening.

A meeting was appointed for this evening and I spoke a while from 2nd Cor 7th c[hapter] [showing] we have this ministry[.] I did not have very good liberty [of speech]. I arose and spoke again confessing that I had not had my usual liberty & said that perhaps their expectations were too great & mine too that we were nothing but men & begged them not to indulge in the belief as though I had come to unite with them &c as these things remained to be seen afterward[.] [The] meeting closed with singing and a good feeling generally.⁴⁶

46. Journal, Oct. 22, 1863, MS 1304: Stephen Post Papers, 1835–1921, box 6, fd. 4, LDS Church History Library.

Post quoted the apostle Paul: “Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:2–4). In other words, they were all Latter Day Saints and shared the same general beliefs, and they should overlook each other’s failings and unite. But Bickerton, for one, remembered all too well Rigdon’s attempt to build a New Jerusalem at Adventure Farm and how he had “wronged” his followers, “corrupted” his adherents, “defrauded” his supporters.

The ministry wanted to talk about it, however, nine days later on October 31. “The afternoon was occupied chiefly by examining Steven Post,” according to the secretary, “a man purporting to have been sent with an appeal to all saints scattered abroad; to acknowledge Sidney Rigdon as the man the Lord has chosen to lead His people in these last days. He also wanted them to acknowledge Rigdon as the Spokesman” who was described in the Book of Mormon (2 Ne. 3:18). They concluded that Rigdon could not be the promised spokesman since he, like Joseph Smith, had English ancestry. The man foretold in the Book of Mormon would be a descendant of the biblical Joseph of Egypt, an Israelite. Smith was a seer among the gentiles whose role was to aid the conversion of the American Indians. The important task of translating the rest of the hidden records would fall, not to Rigdon or even Bickerton, the latter came to believe, but to an American Indian Moses and a spokesman who would make themselves known in the future. Bickerton’s followers believed they had the spirit of discernment, for which the secretary penned his gratitude: “But we thank God that he has given us His Spirit, yea, even the spirit of truth which will lead and guide us in to all truth, and show us things to come. Yea we do thank our Heavenly Father that we do know His voice[,] and a Stranger—we will not follow.”⁴⁷

47. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 61.

After talking with Post and reading Rigdon's *An Appeal to the Latter-Day Saints*, it became apparent the pamphlet the Bickerton church was preparing should respond to the competing succession claims in the framework of an overall history of the movement. Bickerton had been with both Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young and had forsaken them both, finding them to be fallen prophets. This would have to be explained. The world needed to see their church as unique from the competing Latter Day Saint factions.

On Monday, November 9, 1863, Benjamin Meadowcroft shared the Lord's words, approving the pamphlet that would be published by the end of the year.

I have chosen you out of the sons of man to be my servants and to administer my word unto the people of the nations of the earth[,] and they shall write to you from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South, to know the truth, and the way of Salvation. ... Therefore straighten out the things that remain, and I will bare my Holy arm, and I will keep you in such a way and manner as I never kept a people before. And all the world shall know that I, the Lord, ruleth in the camp of Israel by my power that I will manifest through you my people[,] ... [so] that the living may know that the most high hast established His Kingdom among the sons of men. ... And now if you will keep my words, I will bend the Heavens and shake the Earth for your sakes.⁴⁸

The Saints believed the country was destroying itself and the opportunity to send out missionaries was short. Adamant that his church was a shelter from the storm, Bickerton knew the same claim was made by Brigham Young, and knowledge of that rankled. Young too believed he had raised an ensign to the nations. In 1860 he ordered his followers to store grain and other provisions to prepare for the end times that would follow the Civil War. "While the waves of commotion are whelming nearly the whole country," Young had said at the end of the year, "Utah in her rocky fortress is biding her time to step in and rescue

48. Ibid., 50–51.

the constitution.”⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, he said that “God has come out of his hiding-place, and has commenced to vex the nation that has rejected us, and he will vex it with a sore vexation. It will not be patched up—it never can come together again. . . . If our present happy form of government is sustained, which I believe it will be, it will be done by the people I am now looking upon, in connection with their brethren and their offspring.”⁵⁰ Young had decided that nothing could stop the progress of the Civil War and that Joseph Smith’s “prediction is being fulfilled, and we cannot help it.”⁵¹ On that point, he and Bickerton were of the same mind.

At the start of 1864, the ministry asked each branch to purchase a quantity of the missionary tract, *The Ensign*, to distribute to their neighbors. “Take a dollars worth of pamphlets,” the headquarters urged. Responding favorably, the branches soon depleted the supply and it was necessary to reprint the pamphlet that year. The tract was updated with a discussion of the Christian gospel, an essay about the Old Testament, and extracts from three sources: the apostle William Cadman’s journal, the Book of Mormon, and the Utah-oriented *Gospel Reflector* published in Philadelphia. The ministry planned a new wave of missionary tours too, following the success of the excursions of 1863 in which Charles Brown and William Cadman converted twenty-seven people and ordained an elder in Smithfield at the southern edge of the state.⁵²

Continuing the church’s bureaucratization, Bickerton suggested a new limitation on his and others’ revelations, requiring that they be submitted to a council for approval. The Lord would “reveal himself in the midst of council,” the secretary noted, to keep the church “in purity and not be led away by false revelations.” To ease their minds, however, the Lord reassured the Saints in April that they should not

49. Erickson, *Thief in the Night*, 166–68.

50. *Journal of Discourses*, 1861, 8:324.

51. Van Wagoner, *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, 4:2092.

52. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 63; *Ensign* (1864), 42.

anticipate false communications from the prophet. Speaking through Joseph Astin and interpreted by Sam Rowly, the “word of the Lord” assured that “William Bickerton and I will be with you always, even unto the end of the World.”⁵³ Bickerton believed, with the apostle Paul, that the church should “despise not prophesyings” but “prove all things” and “hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:20–21).

His niece, Amanda Bickerton, delivered a revelation in the summer that was a comfort to those facing the military draft: “Any of my servants that are forced into this war, ... I will protect them for I am God. I am strong to deliver, my arm is not short, and therefore put all iniquity away from you and keep in love and unity with each other.”⁵⁴ William Bacon and James Bickerton had enlisted, rather than having been drafted, but they too were protected during some of the war’s worst battles. Bacon’s Pennsylvania 100th Infantry fought in the Second Battle of Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg in 1862; the siege of Vicksburg in 1863; and the Wilderness Campaign and siege of Petersburg in 1864. Bickerton’s Pennsylvania 123rd Infantry fought in the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862 and Chancellorsville in 1863; when he switched to the 14th Cavalry Regiment, he engaged the enemy at Droop Mountain in 1863 and in the battles of Piedmont, Lynchburg, and Rutherford’s Farm in 1864. The 100th Infantry lost 409 men to combat and disease, the 123rd Infantry lost 72 men, and the 14th Cavalry lost 395.⁵⁵

Following the revelation to keep unity and love within the church, apostle William Cadman asked at a conference in July to reinstate Joseph Parsons and ask forgiveness for mistreating him. There had been some kind of disagreement and he had been expelled, “contrary to the law of the Lord,” the secretary wrote. After considering the case, the elders concluded that “he had a cause for stumbling and denying the

53. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 63–64.

54. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

55. Detailed information is available online from the National Park Service at “Battle Unit Details,” *The Civil War*, www.nps.gov/civilwar; also from Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 77, 870.

Authority” of the elders, and that it was not right for him to have been “openly rebuked in a public meeting”; that had been “entirely out of order, and not according to the spirit of truth.” The leadership asked Thomas Bickerton to give “acknowledgement” of the church’s mistake in a letter to Parsons and asked Charles Cowan to deliver it and ask personally for forgiveness.⁵⁶

Another difficult situation occurred in October when apostle James Brown asked permission to leave the church. He was expelled from the quorum in January “for denying its authority,” but was reinstated later. Now they found him once more out of harmony with the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. Nevertheless, when asked to “give an account of himself,” he stood up and “in very few words concluded by requesting to be allowed to withdraw from the Church.” A possible ally, James McDiffit, later explained that Brown was not leaving “because he had anything against anyone, or that anyone had done him any wrong, but because he had seen things different.” The apostles decided to let him exercise “his choice as it regards withdrawing.”

Possibly in response to Brown’s withdrawal from the church, William and Alexander Bickerton made four motions to formalize the church’s stand on controversial doctrines. Their proposals were accepted:

1st.—That we acknowledge no other God but the one, who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Creator and up holder of all things, both visable and un visable. 2nd.—That we as a church reject the doctrine of baptism by proxy. 3rd.—That we also reject the doctrine of lineal Priesthood. 4th.—That God delighteth only in free will offerings and that tithings are contrary to [the] Gospel.⁵⁷

The ministry had been pondering who might replace James Brown in the Quorum of the Twelve when a former candidate for the position, William Bacon, returned from the military. Bacon attended the fall conference in Mingo, ten miles southwest of Elizabeth, to everyone’s

56. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 64–65.

57. Ibid., 63–66; Cadman, *History of the Church*, 47–48.

delight. The morning service on October 16 included the baptisms of three converts: Carolyn Edwards, Sarah Ellen Greybill, and Margaret Jane Wilson. In the evening the members met in Monongahela City at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which had been rented for the rest of the conference; for some subsequent services the public would be invited to attend. Bickerton introduced the speaker, who most likely captivated the audience with accounts of his tour of duty and reliance on the Lord throughout. "A very good time we had," the secretary recorded.⁵⁸ The next day Joseph Astin made a motion to call Bacon back into the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, a suggestion the church received well but chose not to act on immediately, nor was a decision made after a New Year's Eve revelation from Charles Brown that "it is both the word and will of God." Some of the brethren must have thought Bacon needed time to acclimate to civilian life. Midway into the next year, the ordination to the office of apostle took place on July 3, 1865.⁵⁹

Toward the end of 1864, citizens in the Union states went to the polls to re-elect Lincoln. For a while it had looked as if he would lose to his opponent, George B. McClellan, the general Lincoln had fired in 1862 for being slow to act, slow to react, and more interested in spit and polish than engaging the enemy. Now the Democratic candidate was pushing for compromise with the South, to achieve peace through negotiation, while Lincoln wanted peace through military victory. Lincoln knew he would not convince voters to support him unless there was more progress on the battlefield. By now, everyone just wanted the conflict to end. "Unless some great change takes place," he wrote, he would be "badly beaten." Then the change in fortune occurred on September 1 when General William T. Sherman captured Atlanta. The win came in "the very nick of time," the *Richmond Examiner* dolefully commented, "to save the party of Lincoln from irretrievable ruin." The newspaper predicted that the fall of Atlanta would "diffuse gloom over the South." As a South Carolinian,

58. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 66.

59. *Ibid.*, 66, 69.

Mary Boykin Chesnut, penned, "Since Atlanta, I have felt as if all were dead within me, forever. . . . We are going to be wiped off the earth." Many Southerners thought as much when Lincoln won re-election—a victory at the ballot box to match the victory on the battlefield. A commentator from the *London Daily News* summarized it all, saying he was "astonished" at "the extent and depth of [this] determination . . . to fight to the last." The North continued on with earnestness, the editorialist noted, "the like of which the world never saw before, silently, calmly, but desperately in earnest."⁶⁰

And so began Sherman's March to the Sea with 62,000 troops cut free of their supply lines, which meant they had to pillage food and supplies. They were expected to torch anything that could be used in war to "divide the Confederacy in two," as Sherman explained. When they reached Savannah, "the whole army [wa]s burning with an insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina," the state most responsible for the war. By February 1865, the soldiers had reached Columbia in the very center of the state and laid it in ruins. Bickerton probably thought of Christ's warning about the last days, recorded in the Book of Mormon, "I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee; so will I destroy thy cities" (3 Ne. 21:18). "All is gloom, despondency, and inactivity," a South Carolinian wrote. "Our army is demoralized and the people panic stricken. . . . The power to do [anything] has left us. . . . To fight longer seems to be madness."⁶¹

"Fondly do we hope . . . that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away," Lincoln intoned at his re-inauguration on March 4, 1865. "Yet, if God wills that it continue . . . until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"⁶² It was a sentiment

60. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 771, 775, 803, 806.

61. *Ibid.*, 808–829.

62. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8:332–33. The quotation is from Psalm 19:9.

voiced by William Bickerton in *The Ensign* in 1863, although infused with ardent millenarian fervor, “Behold the Lord will come with fire and with his chariots like a whirlwind to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire[,] for by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh, and the slain of the Lord shall be many.”⁶³

The soldier–apostle William Bacon agreed with that. In March he delivered his own prophecy at the church’s headquarters in Green Oak: “Verrely Verrely Thus saith the Lord, I will sweep the earth as with a broom of distruction and the wicked shall be swept from it. And I will make the earth a fit place for my people.” Not everyone would survive, “but others there are that shall live to see the Saviour come in the clouds of Heaven.”⁶⁴ In *The Ensign*, according to Bickerton, “we read that men’s hearts shall fail them for fear, looking for the things which are coming upon the earth. There will be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations; and many false prophets shall arise and deceive many, but in this generation when the signs do appear, the Saviour says, the gospel of the kingdom, or the everlasting gospel, shall be preached to all the world for a witness and then shall the end come.”⁶⁵

There had been unmistakable astronomical signs. In 1859 a solar storm had lit up the night sky and interrupted electrical circuits. A telegraph manager in Pittsburgh referred to “streams of fire” running through the circuits, so hot he worried the lines would melt. The next year saw a series of comets mentioned by poet Walt Whitman as a “strange huge meteor-procession dazzling and clear shooting over our heads.” The next year the country experienced the Great Comet of 1861 that littered the daytime sky with debris for two days and illuminated the nighttime sky as the earth passed through the comet’s tail. During the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862, the Northern Lights suddenly became visible for two days due to solar winds, it has been

63. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 4.

64. “Greenoak Revelations,” 1:3–4.

65. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 4–5.

explained, as “first a glimmer, then a spreading glow, as if all the countryside between Fredericksburg and Washington were afire,” according to one historian.⁶⁶

If that had not been enough, in the pews of the Bickertonite chapels the prediction was proven that in the last days “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). On April 2 an unidentified church member stood and declared in the Lord’s voice that “Verily . . . ye shall go forth, and my power shall go with you, and ye shall know, and all men shall see my mighty hand . . . for I will show to all men that I have a people, therefore, fear not for I will deliver you, and will multiply you in spiritual blessings, and I will establish you, and send Angels to minister unto you—Amen.”⁶⁷

William Bickerton knelt that same day to wash some of the men’s feet and to pronounce blessings on them. He blessed Joseph Astin to be “a messenger unto the people and a scribe unto the Lord,” Benjamin Meadowcroft to know how “to speak the word of the Living God,” having been “made an instrument in the Lord’s hands to do a great work.” He blessed John McPherson “to receive strength from the Lord and in due time to receive his hearing.” If Andrew Rattray stayed “faithful . . . the Lord shall inspire you and ye shall see a better day.” Robert Brown would experience “the voice of inspiration.” To show his gratitude, Charles Brown laid his hands on Bickerton and pronounced a blessing to fulfill the members’ expectation that he would “bring forth the hidden records,” that “angels shall minister unto thee and they shall show thee to lead this people and finish the great work of the Latter Day.”

Later on, Bickerton preached a sermon and “showed where he received his Authority, and how anyone can prove [Bickerton’s] Authority, by rendering obedience to the Gospel of the Son of God.” He

66. “The Great Auroral Exhibition of August 28th to September 4th, 1859,” *American Journal of Science and Arts*, May 1860, 97; Walt Whitman, “Year of Meteors”; Foote, *Civil War*, 2:42.

67. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 68.

pleaded with his people to believe him. "I tell you that God has sent me unto you," he said, and unless they followed him by being baptized and confirmed they would be "damned, I say unto you by the Holy Ghost. Ye will be damned. I appeal not to the authority of Noah, Peter or Paul but to the Authority of Jesus Christ who sent me."⁶⁸

On April 3, 1865, General Robert E. Lee abandoned the town of Petersburg, twenty-four miles south of Richmond, relinquishing the Confederate capital and sending his troops west of the city. Union troops pushed forward, followed by Abraham Lincoln, who had arrived by boat on the James River. He was accompanied by a guard of ten sailors. In Richmond he walked through the charred streets, soon surrounded by jubilant black residents shouting "Glory! Glory! Glory!" and "Bless the Lord!" When one man fell to his knees, Lincoln corrected him. "That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank Him for [your] liberty." Earlier in the day, he himself had remarked to Admiral David D. Porter, "Thank God I have lived to see this. It seems to me that I have been dreaming a horrid dream for four years, and now the nightmare is gone."⁶⁹

Five days later at Appomattox Courthouse, as General Lee surrendered his sword, his eye caught the dark complexion of Ely Parker, a Seneca Indian who served as General Grant's secretary. "I am glad to see one real American here," Lee remarked. "We are all Americans," Parker replied with confidence.⁷⁰ Indian tribes had fought on both sides during the war, even as additional land was being taken from them, resulting in warfare in Colorado Territory and Minnesota. On Good Friday, five days after Lee's capitulation, the war's dramatic conclusion came in the assassination of Lincoln at a theater in Washington, DC. Mary Todd Lincoln recounted her husband's wish to "visit the Holy Land" before he died "and see those places hallowed by the footsteps

68. *Ibid.*, 68–69.

69. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 846–47.

70. *Ibid.*, 849.

of the Savior.”⁷¹ One could understand his longing to see where the original promoter of non-violence had walked and to experience some rest for himself away from the war. What Bickerton longed to see was the same city, but under different circumstances. He wanted to see the city’s glory after Jesus Christ appeared on earth to “reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem.” After that, there would be no more war, a condition he longed for, in common with the rest of the nation.⁷²

71. Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, 297.

72. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 4.

NINE

INTO THE WEST

1865–72

*“This people were as unreasonable and unbelieving, at that time,
as ever the Hosts of Israel were at any time.”*

—William Cadman, 1899

After the Civil War, William Bickerton tried to determine what to do next. The Reconstruction Era was chaotic. Freedmen who could not find work were forced back to the very plantations where they had been confined, now to work for wages below what a white person would accept. Many former slaves became sharecroppers, but were usually exploited by their landowners. Corruption in Washington and in the states under military occupation was rife.¹ Bickerton thought the country would not recover and that Americans had become more profane, less believing, more deserving of God’s abandonment. It was the day of the American Indian, he declared. The problem was that the evidence on the ground showed a different picture. Indian Territory had once comprised a vast area, and now had been reduced to the current states of Oklahoma and half of Kansas, with a few scattered reservations.² There was a gathering, but not along the lines of what Bickerton had expected. The Indians were being pushed farther west to isolated and desolate regions.

He applied a surprising Old Testament verse to the situation, assigning responsibility for the condition of the Indians to the Indians

1. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 124–75.

2. Gibson, *American Indian*, 365.

themselves. “And thou shalt no more be haughty because of mine holy mountain” (Zeph. 3:11), he quoted. From what he knew, it was “a peculiar trait in the character of the Western Indians to be haughty, but they shall be so no more, because God will send his truth unto them.”³ In his mind, what they most needed was the Christianity in the Book of Mormon, along with humility and a willingness to adapt to circumstances. He believed the Indians were descendants of Israel from the tribe of Joseph (and his son Manasseh) and would soon rise up against the country and take back the land, demonstrating by their actions their noble heritage. This was the next element of Joseph Smith’s Civil War prophecy, something the risen Jesus Christ had promised the ancestors of the Indians in the Book of Mormon story.⁴ In the company of a Choice Seer named Joseph, who would suddenly appear among his people, Bickerton planned to help gather the lost tribes of Israel into the New Jerusalem. All roads appeared to be leading to this climactic event, and it would involve important transitions for everyone.

The church was going through its own period of adapting to change. Apparently, members started to complain that the prophecies drawn from the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith had not come true. The war had begun as promised, but had not spread to other countries, and things were returning to normal. Joseph Astin spoke in tongues on July 1, 1865, John Tilford interpreting his verbalizing on behalf of an aggrieved Lord: “The man that denies the Book of Mormon denies the work of God, and is in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity and cannot be one of my people but must be separated.” It was time to prune the vineyard of disbelief, the elders concluded from that, and so they removed evangelist Enoch Ison from the ministry. Two days later they removed two more individuals from priesthood office: Joseph Knox from his calling as an apostle and John Ashton from his calling as an evangelist. In place of Knox, they ordained William Bacon, and in place of James Brown (who

3. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 16.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 87:5; 3 Nephi 21:11–13.

had left), William Skillen. This pleased the Lord, who said through Robert Brown, "Saith the Lord Jesus Christ, Rectify and set things in order at home in your Branches, and then ye shall have power and Authority to go forth on your missions."⁵

On December 30, 1865, the conference was treated to a letter from a missionary, John Stevenson, who was in Chariton, Iowa, and experiencing success. George Barnes declared that the missionaries would prevail against "the enemies of the cause of Christ ... and devils shall tremble" at their presence.⁶

At the summer conference in mid-1866, Bickerton displayed the official seal the church had received authorizing its recent incorporation in Pittsburgh.⁷ This was a minor act of business but one that obviously pleased the prophet because his labors for over a decade had been aimed at earning the church a place of respect in the community. Unlike the Mormons, his group possessed a fairly good reputation among their neighbors. A few years earlier, Brigham Young had defied the federal government with a warning to Congress not to "dictate the Almighty in his revelations." It would be another two decades for the issues plaguing Utah to work their way through the courts, but eventually the church would be disincorporated and have its assets seized.⁸ Maybe the comparison to the desert-dwelling Mormons made Bickerton think of what Isaiah had said, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." This was not meant literally, Bickerton probably explained, but had to do with the redemption of the people of Israel. "I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isa. 44:2–3). He stepped away from the pulpit at that point and circulated through the congregation to

5. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 69–70; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 1:48–49.

6. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 49.

7. In April 1865, the ministry asked apostle Joseph Astin to file for the church's incorporation in Pittsburgh. Then in July 1865, the church paid fees for its charter. See Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 69–71.

8. Bushman and Bushman, *Building the Kingdom*, 66–71; Turner, *Brigham Young*, 322–23.

give male members “a kiss of Charity.” Approaching the pulpit after him was Charles Brown, and after Brown, Bickerton returned to deliver yet another sermon, and “while speaking of the gifts and power of God[,] he spoke in another language.”⁹

On October 7, 1866, apostle John Dixon related a vision he had received of a woman bearing a child and “a man clothed in white robes ... [who] came to the child and gave it a bow and arrow.” It had been determined from previous revelations that an arrow represented the word of God, and a bow indicated proselytizing. Charles Brown’s prophecy in July 1862 had been that God would make the apostles “as a bow—and my word shall go from you as an arrow.”¹⁰ The bow and arrow were traditional among the American Indian, so the imagery pointed in the direction of the outreach the church should anticipate.

With most of the membership in Allegheny County, they were lucky to have escaped the devastation of the Civil War. It was difficult for Northerners to imagine just how bad the situation was in the South. A Georgian described riding a train in August 1865: “Every village and station we stopped at presented an array of ruined walls and chimneys standing useless and solitary.” Someone from South Carolina visiting Baltimore stood mystified by the disparity between conditions in this border state and home. It was “hard to bear ... this exulting, abounding, overrunning wealth of the North [compared to] the utter desolation of the unfortunate South.”¹¹ “With malice toward none,” the words of the US president’s second inaugural address had read, “with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace.”¹² The same theme could be heard

9. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 71.

10. Ibid., 47, 72.

11. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 124.

12. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8:332–33.

echoed in Green Oak. "Look a round you, and gather up the fallan and Stranghten the weak for I have given this power unto you, do this and I will bless you and multeply you Sayth the Lord, Amen," this translation by Benjamin Meadowcroft was voiced after William Bacon spoke in tongues, October 28, 1866.¹³

Among the "weak" who needed uplifting were the Five Civilized Tribes of Native Americans—the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole, who had fought on the side of the Confederacy. Federal officials regarded their involvement as treason. Two US senators from Kansas, James Lane and Samuel Pomeroy, proposed that previous treaties with the tribes be suspended and the Indians be removed from their state. Kansas was where the Indians had been placed already after being deported from Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, Mississippi, and portions of other Southern states—Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Because the tribes occupied some of the best farmland in Kansas, and in their eyes the Indians had not maintained it, Anglos wanted them out. The land looked particularly unkempt in the mid-1860s, the Indians having been forced into refugee camps. They were suffering from malnutrition and disease. The men stayed away for fear of retribution from Union troops. Through loss of life on the battlefield, starvation, and disease, the Indian population in that region was reduced by 25 percent.

The tribes had to sign new treaties ceding more land to the federal government and allowing chartered railroad companies and ranchers to appropriate more land. Troops were stationed in Indian Territory, although so thinly distributed that a measure of lawlessness resulted. Freed slaves ended up in the same area and tried to establish communities from scratch. In doing so, some of them stole corn and chickens, cattle and horses, to which Indians responded by forming vigilante bands. Criminals were attracted to Indian Territory as a hideout after conducting robberies.¹⁴

13. "Greenoak Revelations," 1:5.

14. Gibson, *American Indian*, 383–86, 398–400.

Whether or not the Bickerton community was aware of these conditions, the members began in the winter of 1867–68 to deliberate about how they could move there. Apostle John Neish thought the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed them to get close to the Indians, granting settlers up to 160 acres of free land as long as they resided on it for five years and made improvements. Before Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, about 25,000 settlers had moved west and claimed three million acres.¹⁵ Neish felt it was "ridiculous" to remain in Pennsylvania, "where our temporal opportunities were so much restricted," not to mention the fact that their mission to the Indians lay in the West.¹⁶

A committee formed at the Mingo branch in Monongahela investigated locations and logistics under the direction of William Cadman, assisted by John Neish and others.¹⁷ The first question was whether it was the will of God. The revelations had mentioned that missionaries would be sent out from "this house," meaning the Green Oak headquarters, so would it be wrong to move the headquarters? "We decided, that we had no knowledge ourselves in this, ... [of what] would prevent us from moving west, ... and [that] therefore we could conscientiously investigate," they concluded. By "investigate," they meant not only through normal channels but through prayer, and at the next meeting Cadman reported that "the Almighty revealed to me to my entire satisfaction that He would provide us a home in the Indian Territory, by the preaching of the Gospel."¹⁸

The committee chair needed to present the revelation to a conference in West Elizabeth in April 1868 when the conference would have delegates from each congregation, apparently indicating that the membership was large enough that they could no longer meet

15. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 450–51.

16. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 1.

17. The committee members were Joseph Astin, William Cadman, James Louttit, John Neish, James Nichols, William Skillen, and Daniel Thompson.

18. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 57; "Book of Record," 3, 7; Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 1–2.

together at once. Cadman would represent the Mingo branch. At the opening session, he read aloud his report. Benjamin Meadowcroft gave a tepid endorsement, saying, "I feel more of the power of God in that matter, than I expected to." Bickerton was more sure, saying, "Verily, thus saith the Lord God; the time has come for salvation to go to the Lamanites." The ministry endorsed the pronouncements and agreed to organize a team to visit Indian Territory. It was considered fulfillment of the prophecy the former apostle James Brown had uttered in October 1859, when he interpreted the imagery of two scrolls coming together to imply a meeting of East and West, that God would "gather my people from the West ... to accomplish my great purposes in these last days."¹⁹

At the July conference, Felix McCune was moved "by the power of God" to nominate William Cadman and Benjamin Meadowcroft to undertake the "mission to the Lamanites." One after another, various priesthood leaders stood to endorse this, and then Amanda Bickerton "rose by the Spirit of God" and declared that William Bickerton was also intended to accompany them. The Saints pledged to care for the men's families while they were away, to give three dollars a week to each wife and one dollar for every child under the age of twelve. A committee would "raise or lower the allotment as to the necessity of each case." There was excitement in the air as the Saints realized they were fulfilling prophecy from scripture and from their own oracles, including Henry Bake's 1859 pronouncement that William Bickerton would perform "greater wonders in this generation than what has ever been done."²⁰

The first trip would be exploratory. They would meet tribal dignitaries, preach, and inspect the region for a location for a colony. One night before they embarked, Cadman said,

I dreamed that we had arrived there and had entered the Territory (on foot) near the northeast corner, and were traveling along watching for

19. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 2; "Book of Record," 7.

20. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 74; "Book of Record," 7.

an opportunity of opening up meetings. We came to a certain house and Brother Bickerton said to me: "Brother Cadman, you go to that house and make enquiry for a place to hold meetings, and we will wait here 'til you come back." I did so, and soon returned, telling the Brethren, there was no encouragement for us there. William [Bickerton] said, "Oh well; we will have to go forward then."

Cadman thought little of it at the time, saying he "was not very much impressed with [the dream's] importance," but would soon see its prediction become a reality.²¹

The three men boarded a train in late August 1868 and arrived in Ottawa, fifty miles southwest of Kansas City, on September 3. From there, Bickerton, Cadman, and Meadowcroft took a stage coach sixty miles south to Humboldt, which would have presented a sad scene because the government was removing reluctant Indians from that area.²² After Humboldt, they got lost. Ten miles into their trek, they "encountered a team going directly through the Cherokee nation to the Creek Agency ... who cheerfully submitted to convey us to our destination." They soon after arrived at the little town of Erie thirty miles to the southeast, where they camped for the night. As the sun began to rise, Cadman awoke and felt as if he were in a large building,

apparently as large as the world; its height, breadth, and length seemed all the same, and I could see perfectly, all its extremities; its grandeur was entirely bewildering. I was astonished, exceedingly, and said to myself, "Why, this is not where I lay down." I then said to myself, "This must be a vision." I then thought, that, if it was a vision, I might see through it by looking hard; I looked upward as piercingly as possible for a few moments, when I observed the top becoming thin, and the vision disappeared.

At that moment he heard Bickerton call out to him to wake up. Cadman arose and explained that he had been awake and had seen a vision. Bickerton, to their astonishment, had seen the same thing

21. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 2–3.

22. Miner, *Kansas*, 81, 94–95.

himself, the same grand building as large as the world. It was all “very strange,” they concluded.²³

Their arrival at the Cherokee Nation was delayed because of inclement weather. “In the afternoon of Monday the seventh[,] as we traveled down the western side of Neosho river to the eastward,” they knew from the “sudden darkness, the thunders [that] roared and lightnings [that] flashed” that they were in for a “terrible drenching.” When they asked an Indian man if they could take refuge in his hut, he declined. Favorable weather returned, and they crossed the Grand River on September 8, encountering a black family, the Burgesses, who had apparently become amalgamated into the Cherokee tribe. The family invited the trio into their home and allowed them to refresh themselves and tell why they had traveled to Indian Territory. “Brother Meadowcroft informed them that it was to preach the everlasting Gospel,” Cadman related. The Burgess family was pleased to have the missionaries in their company. “They remarked that it was such men as us that was needed in that Country and conversed very freely and intelligently concerning the object of our visit.” The family directed the missionaries to the home of Lewis Downing, the newly elected chief of the Cherokee Nation.²⁴

Many of the Southern Cherokees who had disliked the previous chief, William Ross, found in Lewis Downing a fresh start. Nevertheless, the split between the two parties ended up producing fist fights at the polls and when the results were announced. At the same time, news of Downing’s election lured expatriates back home who had been living in exile in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations and in Texas.²⁵ As the three missionaries approached Chief Downing’s home, Cadman halted his steps because he “instantly recognized it as the house ... in my dream,” he said. He knew “very positively, that there was no good for us there,” he told the others. “Well, we will have to go anyhow,”

23. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 3; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 53.

24. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 53–54.

25. Woodward, *Cherokees*, 308–09.

Bickerton responded. "Of course, let us go," Cadman replied, "but that is the way it is going to be." When the men reached the door, they inquired if the chief was available. Learning that he would not return until the next day, they asked if they could stay the night and were told they could and were invited to supper.²⁶

Before the meal, the men sat on the porch and sang "Who Are These Arrayed in White," a hymn by Charles Wesley, younger brother of the Methodist founder, John Wesley. A verse of the song reads:

Who are these arrayed in white,
Brighter than the noon-day sun,
Foremost of the sons of light,
Nearest the eternal throne?
These are they that bore the cross,
Nobly for their master stood,
Sufferers in his righteous cause,
Followers of their dying Lord.²⁷

The household enjoyed their singing so much, one of the women who was ill and confined to her bed asked that they sing to her in her room. "We had the grandest spiritual experience possible, at that place, 'til very late that night," Cadman remembered, "which drove away from our minds (for the time being) entirely, the apprehensions occasioned by the aforementioned dream." Later in the night the premonition returned to him "that we were going to pass through hard experience in that country."²⁸

In the morning, the three made plans. "Brother Cadman, you stay here until Mr. Downing comes home, and open up to him the object of our mission as comprehensively as you can," Bickerton instructed, "and I and Brother Meadowcroft will go and visit those colored people we passed last evening." They agreed to meet later on. When the chief arrived that afternoon, he was surprised to find a lone white man

26. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 3.

27. Daniell, *Hymns Sung at Broad Street Church*, 121.

28. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 54; Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 4.

waiting for him, and gave Cadman a cool reception. Among other things, Downing let the missionary know that he, Downing, was himself a Baptist minister. Cadman had the impression that because of this, the chief would actively oppose them, and that showed “the correctness of my dream.”²⁹

On the other hand, Bickerton and Meadowcroft established an immediate rapport with the Burgess family, who were delighted that the missionaries had returned to see them again. Charles Burgess, his wife, and Charles Phillip were baptized the next day, and Burgess was ordained an elder. The missionaries advertised that they would hold worship services that Sunday. Three days later, in the morning and afternoon, congregations of curious Cherokees and blacks gathered in the out-of-doors for what Cadman described as “very good meetings.” One moment in particular stood out for him. Burgess and Phillip both stood up and said they had seen the missionaries’ arrival in dreams “some weeks previous,” and as they said this the rest of the people were “nodding assent that they remembered the declaration.” The following week the missionaries made acquaintance with others of the Cherokee race and became “convinced” that if it were not for the opposition of the chief, it would be possible to establish a successful branch.³⁰

Before deciding anything definitely, they wanted to visit the other tribes. “We accordingly separated ourselves,” Cadman stated. “Brother Meadowcroft and myself went down to the Creeks, whilst Brother Bickerton remained with the Cherokees.” To their surprise and anguish, though, all three fell seriously ill. The sickness “fastened itself into our systems to no small degree,” Cadman wrote. Trudging on despite their weakened condition, the two visiting the Creeks found them, like the Cherokees, divided into two political groups, this time with two separate leaders. “We saw the Chief of one faction in Creek

29. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 4.

30. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 75; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 54–55.

Agency, named Sanns," but felt no rapport with him, so they traveled back to meet up with Bickerton.³¹

Alone in Cherokee territory, Bickerton had attempted to speak to Chief Downing personally and was rebuffed. The chief "refused to receive us as God's people on mission to the red man." On being told they were not wanted there, Bickerton said he "saw a black cloud come between him and me." He came away assuming that they would need to approach the mission differently. "When the time does come, we shall speak [to them in] their own language," he concluded. That would help eliminate the divide between them. For the moment, they had "run against a rock."

That is not to say that Bickerton gave up. He gave a Book of Mormon to an individual he identified as Chief Naze, who was "fairly well educated," and found he "did not make any objections to the book" and invited the missionaries to dinner.³² From this they determined that not all Indians of high standing would reject their message out of hand. They "gave out an appointment for Sunday at a little Indian school house" and attracted attendance but not serious interest. One man took pity on them and let them stay the night. Bickerton thought the indifference they encountered was a result of the Indians' previous contact with white people. He comforted himself with the thought that it wasn't going any better in Utah either, after they heard Brigham Young had taken a hard line, campaigning against Indians who had interfered with Mormon expansion or with the overland traffic. Bickerton also knew it was hard for the Indians in the Kansas area to know what to make of missionaries who carried a Book of Mormon in hand with the Bible.³³

In the end, it was their sickness and depletion of funds that forced them to break off their excursion. "Hitherto, we had fed our souls with the joyful anticipations of a prosperous mission and fortified ourselves

31. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 55.

32. Bickerton, "Testimony, June 1903," 5.

33. *Ibid.*, 5–6; Gibson, *American Indian*, 358.

against small calamities by scriptural examples,” Cadman reminisced, but “disease had fairly attacked our systems and even our reason we perceived was materially shaken, and the necessity of returning home and leaving our work for the present undone seemed to fasten itself upon us like fate.” Traveling “hurriedly toward home,” they “dreaded to arrive there, knowing, or at least fearing that our presence and appearance there would strike a dagger to the fair hearts of our brethren and sisters, and blast the joyous hopes which had so recently animated their whole souls.” They ran low on funds at Pleasant Hill, Missouri, across the border from Kansas, and decided that Meadowcroft, the healthiest among them, “should proceed home,” which he did, and “expressed money to us to convey us also home.”³⁴ Bickerton and Cadman arrived back in Pennsylvania in October after having spent a month in Indian Territory and not having found a location for the church colony. The trip had cost them \$420.³⁵

In Green Oak the first month of 1869, the missionaries spoke briefly about their trip to a conference crowd, including Bickerton’s remark, “Verily thus saith the Lord God, Lewis Downing will be moved out of the way.” Cadman dreamed about the Cherokee chief again two years later, this time that they were at his residence and Downing “expressed regret to me.” This surprised Cadman, especially when he “received in the news in the *New York Tribune* (which I then took) of his assassination.” In fact, the *Tribune* was wrong. Downing was still alive and well, although a year later, in November 1872, he would contract pneumonia and die, presenting a fresh set of circumstances for the Bickerton community to consider regarding the mission to the Indians.³⁶

34. Money sent by “express” was conveyed by train or stage coach in an iron box, in care of a private courier such as Adams Express Company, whose messengers retrieved the packages at the depot or way station and delivered them to the specified individuals. See, for instance, Stimson, *History of the Express Companies*.

35. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 55–56; Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 75.

36. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 56; Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 5; Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 75. The story, as first reported by the *St.*

The July 1869 conference did not turn out the way Bickerton, Cadman, and Meadowcroft had imagined. The three presented a detailed report of their mission, relating all the important events that had transpired, and Cadman shared a lengthy description of the area's geography, foliage, crop production, and demographics to entice the Saints to settle there. Nevertheless, some of the members were unhappy with the outlay of money and poor results from the trip and did not want to hear anything more about sending missionaries west. "In our General Conference," Cadman wrote, "this Mission was practically laid aside and abandoned; I fought against this step desperately, but was overwhelmingly defeated." He thought the ministry was as bullheaded as the Israelites in the Bible who accepted the reports of ten spies over the information provided by their faithful countrymen Joshua and Caleb.³⁷ It was not the only sour note at the conference. The apostle Thomas Bickerton sent a letter in lieu of his attendance, giving an excuse the elders found unacceptable, so they "suspended [him] from his Calling." Apparently the apostle had already been neglectful and had been visited in April 1868 by Morgan Thomas to see "if he intends to Reform his Duty."³⁸

At a conference held in Wheeling, West Virginia, in January 1870, many of the Saints continued to demonstrate indifference about preaching in the West. Instead, they focused on doubling their efforts to preach to the American people in general, and to that end they solicited "aid from each Branch toward supporting the families of those whom the Lord has chosen, and may choose to go and preach the Gospel." John Stevenson and D. L. Shinn, for instance, had been called to venture out on a new missionary tour.³⁹

Louis Republican, was more tentative: "The reported assassination of Lewis Downing, Chief of the Cherokee Nation, if confirmed, ..." See "Reported Murder of Chief Downing," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1871, from the *St. Louis Republican*, Jan. 30, 1871.

37. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 52–57; Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 5.

38. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 75–76; "West Elizabeth Branch," 1:35. At this same conference, William and Charlotte would transfer to the church the deed of the West Elizabeth meeting house that William had paid for.

39. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 58.

On January 4 some of the members knelt down for supplication to God, and afterward D. L. Shinn said,

I saw while upon our knees in prayer, a man of strange appearance. He was I thought, a Jew of the ancient stamp. I thought it was Peter, the old Apostle; he was standing in the middle of the room facing Bro. William Bickerton. I observed his large head, long dark whiskers, his heavy round features, massive forehead and heavy brows. After I had taken a view thus of him, he turned to me, raised his hands, as if to put them upon my head addressing me thus, "How is thy faith?"

George Barnes interpreted this to mean that Shinn was being called on a mission.⁴⁰ A noteworthy element of the vision was Shinn's awareness that the apostle Peter would not have the features of a northern European, the apparent lack of racial preference having been a hallmark of the trip to Indian Territory, too, in the conversion of a black family.

The need to warn Americans rather than Native Americans in particular became even more engrained in the members after they heard Sarah Hercula tell about the vision she received. It was one night when she "went to bed" that the experience overcame her, and she was reminded by it that she should not overlook her own family and friends:

I was carried away in the spirit into a room where the whole Church was gathered together with their hymn books in their hands singing some of the most lovely and beautiful hymns that I ever heard. I beheld my mother sitting near me (she had been dead for many years) and I was astonished to find myself among the Saints. I asked my mother if this was the true Church of God. She said, "Yes, child, this is the only true Church that will stand at the last day," and she said, "Never stop, until you join it." (Repeating it three times.) "Although I am happy, [her mother said,] I knew nothing about this Church while on earth."⁴¹

If there were Americans like Hercula's mother who would have converted if they had heard the gospel message, then why should the Saints devote

40. Ibid., 58–59; Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 77.

41. Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 59.

all their attention to preaching in Indian Territory? There was more missionary work to do within the United States generally, it appeared.

Due to his work schedule, apostle John Dixon was unable to attend this lively meeting. His guilt at having missed it made him feel “to condemn myself,” and in his humility he heard God confirm to his mind that his “servants” should be “set at liberty that they may go forth to publish glad tidings of great things to the Nations of the earth.” He may have understood this to include the Native Americans, but he also interpreted it to mean they should not discontinue their efforts to find other receptive people as well. After all, they had not yet seen “a full end of all nations,” as Joseph Smith’s prophecy had foreseen (D&C 87:6). The idea that there were others still to convert occurred to Bickerton on January 5 while William Moore was sharing a vision he had received in which he saw Andrew Rattray holding a sword and key. All of a sudden Bickerton felt inspired and said, “Verily thus saith the Lord, It is my will that my servant Andrew Rattray be ordained an Apostle and set apart to gather the Old Saints into my Church,” meaning that Rattray should visit members of the rival Latter Day Saint factions. The conference endorsed this, and Rattray was immediately ordained to replace Thomas Bickerton in the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. In the afternoon the Saints determined that if Mormons or others converted after being members of one of the other factions, they would have to “acknowledge the Authority of the Church by baptism.”⁴²

During the past five years, the Saints had replaced three apostles and lost some of their dissident members. Discipleship had proven to be difficult. Therefore, Bickerton prophesied that God would, in essence, separate the wheat from the chaff (Matt. 3:12) so that when they were sent forth they would “go in faith and the power of the Great Jehovah.” The imagery of an adamant Old Testament Jehovah was intentional—the side of deity inclined to “turn and overturn,” “tear up and pull down,” and “break in pieces” the hearts of those who professed to love the truth. God would then “fit and join together the timbers,”

42. Ibid.; Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 77.

in other words gather in the true Saints, including some from the other Latter Day Saint factions. Then the church would be “firm as a rock.”⁴³

It was decided to send Rattray and Joseph Knox, who had re-committed himself, to Illinois to visit the schismatic Latter Day Saints. John Stevenson was sent to West Virginia to support the congregation there. In April the men gave reports on their travels, but the trips turned out to have been uneventful. Taken aback by the fruitlessness of the effort, the members decided “the brethren had not fulfilled their missions and that [their assignments] still remained to be carried out.” Rattray and Knox had barely penetrated the state of Illinois, traveling only a few miles across the border from Indiana to spend most of their time in a rural area around Danville. After debating with a Campbellite preacher and ordaining an elder named David Doop, they returned home. Stevenson went to the area of the Long Drain waterway sixty miles south of Wheeling to see some recent converts. He discovered that the members were not yet grounded in the teachings of the Book of Mormon. This elicited a flurry of responses from members speaking in tongues and interpreting the message to be that, as George Barnes said, no minister could organize a “Church of Latter Day Saints” without “the light and glory that attends the Book of Mormon.”⁴⁴

Three months later the ministry renewed its call to Rattray and Knox to return and “fulfill the mission the Lord had given” them. Rattray was called to the front for the laying on of hands, and as he walked forward “the Savior appeared before him and a voice [called] to him saying, ‘have I not sent thee?’” Rattray said he was astonished, telling the conference in a rhetorical voice, “Can I then say, I have not been an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus?”⁴⁵

Despite Rattray’s and Knox’s renewed dedication to preach, the Bickertonites as a whole found themselves once again at variance with

43. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 78; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 59–60.

44. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 78.

45. Ibid.

each other about moving into the West. Some wanted instead to move to Tennessee, possibly to convert the remaining Lamanites there rather than in Kansas and Indian Territory. Cadman scoffed at the idea. The Cherokee had been removed from Tennessee. Would they encounter Lewis Downing, he wanted to know, referencing Bickerton's prophecy that Downing would be "moved out of the way." "Certainly not," Cadman chided.⁴⁶

The frustration felt by Cadman and others must have been heightened when Bickerton said one of the brethren would become a Judas: "Thus saith the Lord, unto that man, that will fight against this Church, God will make him of the synagog[ue] of Satan." The next day when Charles Cowan, one of the church's evangelists, was called in, he announced that he did not believe in excommunication and "did not believe in his calling of Evangelist." He had mostly grown tired of the church judging others when he personally believed that only God could judge. Acknowledging his right to his opinion, the ministry removed him from his calling, fulfilling Sister Davis's July 1861 dream of Cowan holding a child he thought was dead, the child representing the church.⁴⁷

"We believe that this Church has a right to deal with its members as the New Testament scriptures direct, on disorderly conduct, or the violation of the commandments of the Lord," Bickerton wrote in *The Ensign*, "but it has no authority to try men on the right of property, of life, or to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy, either life or limb, neither to inflict any physical punishment upon them. We can only excommunicate them from this Church and withdraw from their fellowship."⁴⁸ According to its established rules, it appears the church was not beyond its rights in disfellowshipping Cowan. His response, though, was to form an alliance with the prophet's older brother Thomas Bickerton, who had been relieved of

46. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 5.

47. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 37, 79.

48. Bickerton, *Ensign*, 14.

his apostleship, and the two would thereafter create a division in the church, gathering a small group of sympathizers around them.⁴⁹ Attempts to reintroduce harmony in the church went unrealized. George Barnes in October spoke of the Israelites when they “passed through the wilderness [and] God was with them [so that] wheresoever Israel moved, they moved together, and God moved with them.” It was an appropriate example, considering the difficulty the Israelites had following Moses. As Barnes spoke, seven men—William Bacon, William Bickerton, Charles Brown, William Cadman, Alexander Cherry, Hugh Scott, and John Stevenson—stood up to show support for what was being said. A suggestion from the Mingo branch to appoint a minister who would visit all the branches during the next year was upheld, and the crowd unanimously chose William Bickerton to do so. The Mingo branch pledged \$100 in his support.⁵⁰ They knew that something had to be done to help the church heal from its wounds.

Toward the end of the year, November 6, 1870, the Lord made known that Bickerton, unlike Moses, would not be replaced due to unfaithfulness (Num. 20:12). Benjamin Meadowcroft spoke in tongues to the Green Oak branch, interpreted as follows.

Hear ye the [interpretation][,] O my [people][,] the Lord [has] Suffered Division that my Church may be Clensed from unbleavers, for I have made [a promise] unto you, and the doubtful and [unbelieving] I will [separate] from you, for nether man nor women which speak [evil] of my Servant William Bickerton is of use but is of the devil, therefor I will Strengthen my Servant with wisdom and Knowlage and faith and power and glory and I will arm my Servant [against] all the powers of darkness, there is nether man nor women nor feet of men that lift up arms [against] my Servant William Bickerton [that] Shall prosper, for they shall be a Shamed of themselves and there own words Shall [accuse] them. Therefor be ye Strong O my Servants be ye Strong be ye Strong, in my word, for I will bring in [among] [you] faithful and [determined] men that will

49. See “List of Branches and Members,” 98.

50. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 80.

[assist] you in my work[.] As I am able to Shake the Heavens and Earth I am also able to make you Stand, Amen.⁵¹

Yet the December conference quickly devolved into infighting. Some of the members disparaged William Cadman's resolution to discuss the Indian mission. The Mingo branch wanted help dealing with the "Cowanites," who were causing "a deal of trouble" in their area. Cadman wrote that he became so distraught, "I remember very well, in going home from that Conference, I was hanging down my head, being grieved and discouraged intensely." He had pushed through a resolution in October to further investigate sending at least some of the Saints west. "I felt delighted, then, and thought ... we should discover what had been wrong, and be able to correct ourselves and proceed." Instead of that, "when the time came" for final approval, Cadman continued, "I was grievously disappointed, for instead of the matter being investigated, it was ridiculed severely, and myself too, for supposing there was any cause for investigation." He remembered his vision in Kansas, shared by Bickerton, of the "wonderous beauty" and "glory of Zion," not just on earth, but also in the next life. "We were in a realm beyond our sphere, as poor, degraded mortals here. We can never expect to attain to the heavenly by pursuing the earthly ... hence our failure."⁵² It was because they had been concentrating too much on the financial feasibility and logistics of the mission, he decided, that they had not considered the spiritual side of it. The spiritual blessings would completely outweigh the material benefits of acquiring land near Indian Territory, Cadman thought. It may be true that more suitable, charming, or fertile lands existed in Tennessee and elsewhere, but Cadman understood that his and Bickerton's vision revealed the glorious spiritual wealth the Saints would achieve by preaching to the descendants of Israel. The Book of Mormon said the Indians would be "nursed by the Gentiles" and "carried in their arms" and "upon their shoulders" (1 Ne. 22:6). They would

51. "Greenoak Revelations," 1:7.

52. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 80; Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 6.

not all simply convert at once; they needed assistance, both in spiritual matters and in other ways too, he concluded.

He and Bickerton were still unable to dissuade a good number of members from moving to Tennessee in 1871. The members traveled some 600 miles to the southwest and took advantage of the Homestead Act.⁵³ It was another 600 miles from there to the Indian settlements on the far side of Missouri. Tennessee was 25 percent black and had an active Ku Klux Klan. When Andrew Flowers, a black man, won his election over a white candidate for justice of the peace in Chattanooga in 1870, Flowers was whipped. "They said they had nothing particular against me," he remarked, "but they did not intend any nigger to hold office in the United States."⁵⁴ Bickerton and others could not believe their fellow members would cast their lots with people of such a state. "When a number of our people emigrated to Tennessee, in the spring of 1871," Cadman wrote, "was it not an act of unbelief in what had been revealed to this people concerning Indian Territory? Certainly it was. From the time this spirit of unbelief took possession of our people, in the fall of 1868, the course of this Church has been steadily downward."⁵⁵

To make circumstances bleaker, Andrew Rattray's report in April, after returning from Illinois and Missouri, did not impress the Saints any more than his report of his first mission. He had visited members of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) headquartered in Independence, Missouri, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) headquartered in Plano, Illinois, without results. Both churches had claims and objectives similar to those of Bickerton. The Church of Christ was overseen by Granville Hedrick and occupied land Joseph Smith had designated in 1831 as the site for the New Jerusalem. After being visited by an angel and instructed to gather there, Hedrick had led a sizeable membership to Independence. One of the original members of Joseph Smith's Quorum of Twelve Apostles, John E. Page,

53. Martin and Mancini, "History of the Church," 82.

54. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 426–27.

55. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 5–6.

had helped unify the Illinois and Indiana branches of Bloomington, Crow Creek, Eagle Creek, Half Moon Prairie, and Vermillion, and he had ordained Hedrick an apostle and then a “prophet, seer, and revelator,” and the members of these branches formed the core of the group that moved to Missouri.⁵⁶

The RLDS church had begun when Jason W. Briggs, onetime follower of James J. Strang and William Smith, received a revelation to “wait for the seed of Joseph,” meaning the son of Joseph Smith. With another former follower of Strang, Zenas H. Gurley, the two men established the Reorganized Church and convinced Joseph Smith III to lead them.⁵⁷ After approaching the RLDS, Rattray found that despite their appeal to priesthood authority and prophetic gifts, they seemed to be “not better than any other sect.” The Hedrickites were similarly “difficult,” and, in Rattray’s opinion, “deficient in knowledge of the spirit and destitute of all the power of God.” Rattray did learn that the “Colored brother” in Kansas, Charles Burgess, was “going about preaching among” the Cherokee and was “considered to be a smart man.”⁵⁸

Matters grew less auspicious for an exodus to Kansas when Alexander and Arthur Bickerton were stripped of their apostleship. They were missing from the July conference without explanation and so removed from office until they could explain their absence. John Dixon was “in full expectation that [Alexander] would be here” and had been detained, but that did not prove to be the case. Arthur Bickerton sent a letter to the conference, but the ministry ruled it was insufficient to exonerate him, and he too was suspended.⁵⁹

These were internal matters having to do with faith and devotion. Then on July 6 the unthinkable happened when flames consumed the Green Oak headquarters. The fire began in “the hotel next adjoining,”

56. Addams, “Church of Christ (Temple Lot),” 206–11.

57. Speck, “From Strangites to Reorganized Latter Day Saints,” 146–50.

58. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 82. By comparison, Brigham Young forbade the ordination of blacks, a policy that would not change until 1978 (LDS Official Declaration 2).

59. Martin and Mancini, 83.

the *Monongahela Valley Republican* reported. Both buildings were “burned to the ground.”⁶⁰ Two days later when the ministry met, Cadman saw this as the Lord’s punishment for their lack of harmony:

When the General Conference of 1871 arrived, it found us in this situation; part of our people gone to Tennessee; the rest all unsettled, and confidence largely broken. I returned home as soon as Conference was over. I had only been home a few hours when I received word of our meeting house at Greenoak being burned. I was more grieved than astonished at this occurrence, and expressed astonishment that we were not all burned in it; in view of our conduct in recent years.⁶¹

The unavoidable conclusion by members was that this disaster contradicted what Bickerton said the Lord told him in 1859, “I will set my Angels to guard this [meeting] House that ye have built unto me.” It was a witness against their leader’s prophetic authority, they concluded.⁶² Bickerton had the support of the majority of delegates, however. The members soon found a lot in nearby Coultersville, across the Youghiogheny River from Green Oak, that could be purchased for \$500. But after purchasing the land, the contention was so disruptive that the building would never be finished. The destruction of headquarters was a setback for everyone, regardless of perspective, and contributed to a general indecisiveness for years to come.⁶³

Benjamin Meadowcroft remained upbeat. On September 30, 1871, he reported that “two have been baptized [in Green Oak] since last Conference.” The ministers agreed to set aside tobacco in order to give a good impression to the public. A decision was made to reconsider the Indian mission and discuss it at the January 1872 conference.⁶⁴ If Meadowcroft thought the church would soon be back on track,

60. “Church Burned,” *Monongahela Valley Republican*, July 13, 1871. Cadman wrote that the fire occurred on July 4, but the newspaper had it as July 6.

61. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 6–7.

62. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 84; “Book of Record,” 8.

63. Cadman, *Religious Experiences*, 7.

64. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 85; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 62.

though, the reality of the coming year was anything but encouraging. At the January conference, there was disagreement over whether the Indian mission was worth pursuing at all, and they merely decided to lay it over until such time as it might be “brought forward by the Holy Spirit of God.”⁶⁵ Bickerton was alarmed to learn of another development as well, this time a racist doctrine that had taken hold of the Little Redstone branch, about twenty miles to the south. The ministry asked secretary Joseph Astin to correct the members’ misgivings about the African race. It was, perhaps, the kind of issue one would expect during the era of Reconstruction.

By order of the Conference

An Epistle unto the Church of Jesus Christ at Little Redstone

Beloved Brethern & Sisters in the Lord[,] the Conference sends greeting.

It having come to the attention of the conference that there is some feeling insisting in some parts of the Church, that would rather slight the [colored]⁶⁶ people, therefore the Conference sought after the mind of the Lord upon the subject.

And it was felt by the Holy Spirit that the Lord looked upon Israel and blessed them yet they, themselves looked upon the Gentiles as unclean, Until God showed unto his Servant Peter that he had clensed the gentiles by his Spirit, by them obeying the Gospel, therefore he was not to call them unclean[.] In like manner have we also been led to look on the Colloured people as being beneath the Gentiles[,] but the Gospel brings them up and makes them have Equal access unto the Supper of the Lord, and Equal Fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joseph Astin[,] Recording Secretary of the Church

Given January 2, 1872[,] West Elizabeth

On January 25, 1872, the *Monongahela Valley Republican* published a description of the church and its teachings. The editor suggested that “it would be well for our people to study and be informed as to this

65. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 86; Cadman, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*, 62–63.

66. The letter has “collordrd” people. See “Redstone Valley Branch,” 8–9.

sect of Christians who now have a church and a growing congregation in our midst." An anonymous person, presumably a member of Bickerton's church, wrote an accompanying defense of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁷ Another anonymous member added a note on February 5 making sure readers understood that the church was not associated with Brigham Young. "You must not confound the rising congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of L.D.S. of Monongahela City and vicinity with the Salt Lake Mormonry—they have neither lot nor part with them." The member credited the "breach" between the two churches to polygamy. "The church in Monongahela city and vicinity remain[s] true to the Faith once delivered to the Saints, whilst Salt Lake Mormonry by the practice of Polygamy have incorporated that into their system which is alike repugnant to Christian civilization and a pure morality. Truth."⁶⁸

The newspaper coverage was gratifying, yet Bickerton aspired for a more substantive achievement. Members had quarreled over the church's authority, moved to Tennessee, questioned the integrity of his revelations, lapsed into racism in one instance, wondered about the Book of Mormon, and most regrettably opposed the Indian mission. Members were becoming contentious and idle. This had to stop, Bickerton resolved. It bothered him that he and two others had braved the elements and risked life and limb to reach the Native Americans, all for the disapproval of the community of Saints. He was determined, as the others had expected of Andrew Rattray and Joseph Knox, to finish his mission.

A glimmer of hope for a better future did arise at the winter conference in January 1872 when Bickerton volunteered to devote his life to proselytizing, given that the church would reimburse his travel expenses. The conference accepted the proposal. An elder laid his hands on the prophet's head and promised that as he "gather[ed] the sheep of Israel's flock, God shall work by thee in sign[s] and miracles and gifts of the

67. "The Mormons," *Monongahela Valley Republican*, Jan. 25, 1872.

68. "The Mormons," *Monongahela Valley Republican*, Feb. 15, 1872.

Holy Ghost.”⁶⁹ Bickerton concluded that this meant he would be successful, and that in establishing a stake in the West, he would thereby fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (Isa. 54:2–3). The American Indians were exiled to a shrinking area in the West, their numbers depleted, but before long they would prosper and become more numerous than the European Americans, Bickerton believed Isaiah to be saying. They would inhabit the cities of the gentiles and stretch forth the glorious tent of Zion as one of the lost tribes of Israel. Bickerton yearned to take part in the millennial drama and to see it come to fruition at the edge of Indian Territory.

69. Martin and Mancini, “History of the Church,” 86.

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